

Spring 4-2-2014

## Finding, Tracking, Advocating - Keeping Up with Legislation and Legislators

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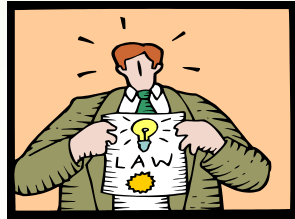
Balch, Timothy A., "Finding, Tracking, Advocating - Keeping Up with Legislation and Legislators" (2014). *Libraries Faculty Research*. Paper 39.

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WVLA Spring Fling April 2, 2014

Timothy A. Balch, Marshall University Libraries



# Finding, Tracking, Advocating

Keeping Up with Legislation  
and Legislators

# Why Bother?



"...our democracy depends on us for more than simply casting our votes. **Our representatives also need to hear directly from us, either through letters or in person...** On any given issue that comes up on Capitol Hill, you can bet they'll be hearing from lobbyists, interest groups.... But **in order for our representatives to do their jobs well, they also need to understand their constituents....**"

Lee Hamilton, Congressman, 1965 - 1999

[http://72.32.58.69/radio\\_commentaries/cornerstones\\_of\\_active\\_citizenship.php](http://72.32.58.69/radio_commentaries/cornerstones_of_active_citizenship.php)



# Online Sources for Political News



- CQ Roll Call <http://www.rollcall.com/>  
Detailed reporting of all the doings on the Hill. Covers numerous policy areas, influential staffers, lobbying, etc. Good reference material on member seniority, fundraising, and media appearances. Individuals can register to set up email alerts.
- CQ Weekly <http://library.cqpress.com/cqweekly/>  
Weekly news and analysis of people and events in Congress. Tables track key votes, presidential support votes, party unity, status of appropriations bills, etc.
- National Journal <http://www.nationaljournal.com>  
Good news coverage of Congress, US politics, some key sectors like Defense, Energy, and Health Care. Also hosts the subscription-only *Almanac of American Politics*, a useful source for all kinds of info on members and staffers.

# Online Sources cont.

- ▶ Politico <http://www.politico.com/>  
Good source for news on Congress and Capitol Hill
- ▶ New York Times, Washington Post, and other news sites often have good political coverage.
- ▶ Any number of political or issue sites, such as:
  - ▶ Real Clear Politics <http://www.realclearpolitics.com/>
  - ▶ Daily Kos <http://www.dailykos.com/>
  - ▶ Huffington Post <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/politics/>
  - ▶ Townhall <http://townhall.com/>
  - ▶ Conservative Voice <http://townhall.com/conservativevoice.aspx>
  - ▶ Jezebel <http://jezebel.com/>
  - ▶ ThinkProgress <http://thinkprogress.org/>
  - ▶ AlterNet <http://altnet.org/>
  - ▶ RH Reality Check <http://rhrealitycheck.org/>

# Other Sources

- E- mail alerts

- ALA Washington Office

- <http://www.ala.org/offices/wo/>

- <http://capwiz.com/ala/ww/home/>

- WVLA Listserv: [WVLA-LIST@listserv.wvu.edu](mailto:WVLA-LIST@listserv.wvu.edu)

- Many advocacy groups will send you alerts

- Twitter

- ALA Washington Office [https://twitter.com/ala\\_wo\\_leinfo](https://twitter.com/ala_wo_leinfo)

- Facebook groups [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

# Finding Federal Legislation



## ➤ <http://beta.congress.gov/>

Replacement for THOMAS legislative system. Contains all legislation from 1973-present; the Congressional Record and committee reports from 1995-present. Can search or browse for legislation by category, member, or committee. No tracking options.

Note: THOMAS is still available until end of 2014 at <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>

## ➤ <https://www.govtrack.us/>

Contains all legislation from 1973-present, some limited info on bills from earlier periods, roll call votes from 1789-present, and much more. Best source for tracking bills, members, and committees. Also tracks some state legislation.



Current Legislation  Examples: hr5, sres9, "health care"   [Advanced Search](#)

**Most-Viewed Bills**

- [S.84](#) [113th] Paycheck Fairness Act
- [H.R.3979](#) [113th] Emergency Unemployment Compensation Extension Act of 2014
- [S.2199](#) [113th] Paycheck Fairness Act

**Bill Searches and Lists**

- [Introduced](#) | [Public Laws](#) 113th Congress (2013-2014)
- [Active Legislation](#) (Senate.gov Finding Aid)
- [Appropriations](#)

**Current Legislative Activities**

113th Congress (2013-2014)

**House of Representatives**



Next Meeting: April 28, 2014  
Previous Meeting: April 10, 2014

- [House Calendars](#)
- [House Floor Activities](#)
- [Roll Call Votes](#)
- [Committee Hearings Video](#)
- [Committee Hearings Schedule](#)

**Senate**



Next Meeting: April 28, 2014  
Previous Meeting: April 11, 2014

- [Senate Calendar of Business](#)
- [Executive Calendar](#) (PDF, 357KB)
- [On the Senate Floor](#)
- [Roll Call Votes](#)
- [Committee Hearings Schedule](#)

Read about the latest legislative activity in the [Congressional Record](#). Get the app for: [iPhone](#) or [iPad](#)

**Current Members of Congress**

Show current members from:   [Show all members >](#)

**The Legislative Process**

[Nine videos explain each of the common legislative stages](#), and that the process by which a bill becomes law is rarely predictable.



[JPG \(179KB\)](#) | [PDF \(530KB\)](#)

**The U.S. Founding Documents**

[A gallery of study resources](#) about significant primary source documents from American history.

**Nominations and Treaties**

Search for [presidential nominations](#) and [treaties](#) on the THOMAS site.

**New on Congress.gov**

- [Advanced Search](#), [Browse](#), [Appropriations Table Added](#)
- [Beta Readies for Starring Role](#)
- [Congress.gov September 2013 Update](#)

**About Congress.gov**

Presented by the Library of Congress using data from the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Office of the Secretary of the Senate, and the Government Printing Office, Congress.gov will eventually incorporate all the information on the THOMAS site.

[More about the beta site >](#)





Trending on GovTrack now...

[H.R. 4426: Clean Energy Victory Bond Act of 2014](#)

[H.R. 4415: Emergency Unemployment Compensation](#)

[H.R. 3979: Emergency Unemployment Compensation](#)

[H.R. 4302: Protecting Access to Medicare Act of 2014](#)

X

govtrack.us

baich@marshall.edu | Log Out | Search

HOME BROWSE TRACK ABOUT USE OUR DATA

# Easily track the activities of the United States Congress.

Use GovTrack to keep tabs on your representatives in Congress or to research pending legislation that might impact your life or business.

START TRACKING NOW ▶

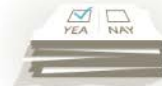
find INFORMATION



MEMBERS of CONGRESS



BILLS & RESOLUTIONS



VOTING RECORDS



COMMITTEES

and now **STATE LEGISLATION!**

in CONGRESS

Signed by the President

S. 404: Green Mountain Lookout Heritage Protection Act

[More information...](#)

Date: APR 15, 2014

from the GovTrack Blog

[The Congressional Data Coalition writes to House Appropriators](#)

Posted on Apr 09, 2014 9:43 p.m.

Update 4/9/2014: The House Appropriations committee accepted our request. In their report for FY 2015 legislative branch appropriations: The Committee request that the Clerk of ...

<https://www.govtrack.us/>

# Finding Legislation cont.



► <http://www.opencongress.org/>

Data from 109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005)-present. Track bills, members, and committees; compare members voting records; get permalinks to individual lines of bill text; create tracking widgets. Includes an interactive message builder for contacting all 3 reps at once.

► <http://scout.sunlightfoundation.com/>

Uses open data to create email or SMS alerts for bills in Congress, court opinions, federal regulations, state bills, GAO reports, and speeches in Congress. Can also add RSS feeds from any source to customize alerts.

Enter a lawmaker's name, issue area or bill number to search OpenCongress. Discover who represents you, find relevant legislation and learn how to take action.



Popular Searches: [unemployment extension](#), [unemployment](#), [bills](#), [health](#), [amend](#)

TODAY IN CONGRESS: 4/16



House: In Session



Senate: Returns Apr. 28th

## Hello! From the Sunlight Foundation

The Sunlight Foundation is now the sole operator of OpenCongress. This site will continue to be a comprehensive, nonpartisan source for what's happening in the United States Congress.

[Learn more about Sunlight](#)

We depend on the generosity of our supporters

Sunlight produces dozens of tools to help you connect with government, track political influence and even power websites of your own. Now, we need your help.

Donate Now

RECENT ACTIVITY IN VOTES





GET STARTED

Simple phrase Advanced

e.g. crowdfunding, intellectual property, 5 USC 552

# GET ALERTS ON ISSUES YOU CARE ABOUT.

CONGRESS AFTER CONGRESS STATE LEGISLATION AND MORE!

Stay up to date on the Hill, from [bills](#) to [speeches](#) to [government reports](#).

What happens after a law passes? Follow [regulatory activity](#) and [court opinions](#) across the federal government.

Track [state legislative action](#) for all 50 states, plus D.C. and Puerto Rico. Powered by [Open States](#).

Get custom alerts [via RSS](#) or [Atom feeds](#), such as alerts on [new FEC filings](#). Or, [create custom collections](#) of alerts.

## FEATURED COLLECTIONS



The Electronic Frontier Foundation is following [NSA spying reform](#).



SHARE SCOUT

Tweet 543

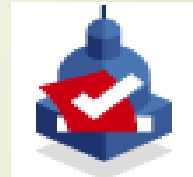


# Finding Legislation cont.



- <https://www.popvox.com/>

Not a discussion forum but rather a place for action. Makes it easy to contact Members of Congress. Open API and several interesting widgets for visualizing and mobilizing support/opposition to bills.



- <http://politics.nytimes.com/congress>

Covers major bills, votes, and nominations. Provides recent actions and links to full text of bills. Can browse by subject category and get feeds for all their trackers.



Create a POPVOX Organization Page to elevate your profile and share your issue expertise with Congress and verified constituents. [Get Started](#)

Sign up for updates

BETA

Blog

Press

About

bill number or keywords



YOUR VOICE

✓ VERIFIED

● QUANTIFIED

↻ AMPLIFIED

## YOUR MESSAGE IN THE LANGUAGE OF CONGRESS

- 1 Find a bill you care about.
- 2 Choose to support or oppose it.
- 3 Share your opinion with Congress and the world.

GET STARTED

✓ SUPPORT  
OR  
✗ OPPOSE



for Organizations

Increase your visibility on Capitol Hill with the searchable Organization Directory.

Get bottom-line data with real-time reports on specific bills.

Build grassroots support for bill re-introduction.

Register Your Organization

for Congress

Stay on top of your legislative portfolio with bill-tracking tools.

Find organizations by issue—and who to contact there.

Get a real-time read on public sentiment on specific bills.

Register as Congressional Staff

News Feed

APR 15, 2014

**Issue Spotlight: Taxes.** It's Tax Day, and if you're like ...

APR 12, 2014

**Issue Spotlight: Horses.** Horses have long been a part of ...

APR 11, 2014

**The POPVOX Top 20: April 4 - 10.** It was budget week in Congress! The ...

APR 8, 2014

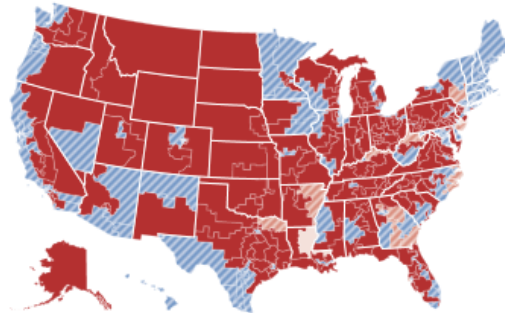


## Latest Major Vote

THURSDAY | H.CON.RES.96

### Approves GOP Budget

Establishing the budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2015 and setting forth appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2016 through 2024



Passed in the House by 6 Votes

Yes Votes    Dem 0    Rep 219

No Votes    Dem 193    Rep 12

Details of the Vote on H.CON.RES.96

»

Article: House Approves Budget With Big Spending Cuts

## House

No session scheduled for today.

### VOTES

- Major Votes
- Most Recent

### BILLS

- Likely to Be Considered Today
- Major Bills
- Recent Actions
- By Category

## Senate

No session scheduled for today.

### VOTES

- Major Votes
- Most Recent

### BILLS

- Likely to Be Considered Today
- Major Bills
- Recent Actions
- By Category



# Following Committees



- ▶ Govtrack and OpenCongress good for tracking committee bills and activity
- ▶ Senate: [https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/d\\_three\\_sections\\_with\\_teasers/committees\\_home.htm](https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/d_three_sections_with_teasers/committees_home.htm)
- ▶ House: <http://www.house.gov/committees/>
- ▶ No standard format for Committee sites; some have lots of useful info—reports, press releases, hearing video and transcripts, etc.—but many do not.
- ▶ Many committees have subcommittees with their own websites (the link for the minority party is sometimes buried in the footer).

# Votes

## Complete Roll Call

All States



All Parties



- ▶ Roll call votes (also linked from Congress.gov):
  - ▶ House (1990-present): <http://clerk.house.gov/legislative/legvotes.aspx>
  - ▶ Senate (1989-present):  
[https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/a\\_three\\_sections\\_with\\_teasers/votes.htm](https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/a_three_sections_with_teasers/votes.htm)
  - ▶ Senate cloture votes (1917-present):  
[https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/reference/cloture\\_motions/clotureCounts.htm](https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/reference/cloture_motions/clotureCounts.htm)
- ▶ Govtrack has roll call votes back to 1789
- ▶ NYT Inside Congress has nice graphic view of votes  
<https://politics.nytimes.com/congress/votes>

# Calendars and Schedules



## ▶ U.S House

- ▶ floor schedule: <http://majorityleader.gov/Floor/>
- ▶ committee hearings schedule: <http://docs.house.gov/committee/>
- ▶ today's calendar and history of legislation:  
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/getTodaysHouseCalendar.action>

## ▶ U.S. Senate

- ▶ floor schedule:  
[https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/d\\_three\\_sections\\_with\\_t\\_easers/calendars.htm](https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/d_three_sections_with_t_easers/calendars.htm)
- ▶ committee hearings schedule:  
[https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/b\\_three\\_sections\\_with\\_t\\_easers/committee\\_hearings.htm](https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/b_three_sections_with_t_easers/committee_hearings.htm)
- ▶ today's Legislative Calendar:  
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/getTodaysSenateCalendar.action>

# Finding WV Legislation



## West Virginia Legislature

<http://www.legis.state.wv.us/index.cfm>

[http://www.legis.state.wv.us/Bill\\_Status/bill\\_status.cfm](http://www.legis.state.wv.us/Bill_Status/bill_status.cfm)

Bill status for the West Virginia Legislature back to 1993

[http://www.legis.state.wv.us/billstatus\\_personalized/PBT/persbills\\_login.cfm](http://www.legis.state.wv.us/billstatus_personalized/PBT/persbills_login.cfm)

Create an account and then follow bills of interest. Multiple lists can be set up and named.

# Free Apps



Examples:

- ***Congress*** and ***Open States*** (both from The Sunlight Foundation)
- ***TrackBill***
- ***Pocket Congress***
- ***WV Bills - WV Legislature Live Updates***

Available through the AppStore, GooglePlay, and various web sites.

# Now What? – Advocacy!



- Be prepared before you contact your legislator
  - If your organization has a position, know what it is.
  - If this is on your own, do some research.
  - Know what your legislator's position is on the issue and why (previous votes, political party, pressure from constituents/influential groups).
  - Know the arguments of the opposing side and be prepared to counter them.



# Advocacy cont.

- Decide how you want to contact your legislator
  - E-mail – personal or through a website
  - Written letter or fax
  - Telephone
  - Personal visit – district office, DC office, local town-hall event
- Decide when to contact your legislator
  - During the committee hearings
  - Just before a floor vote



# Written communication

- ▶ Be clear and concise
  - ▶ Address only one issue
  - ▶ Specify the bill number
  - ▶ Be explicit about what you want the legislator to do
- ▶ State your position (for or against) and make two or three of your strongest arguments.
  - ▶ Tell how the issue affects you, your family, and your community.
- ▶ Identify yourself and your constituency.
- ▶ Ask for a reply.
- ▶ Avoid form letters/emails – rewrite them as personal communications.
- ▶ Be aware that written letters to the DC office may be delayed for security checks.



# Telephone



- ▶ Same general rules as for written communications
  - ▶ Can be especially effective right before a vote
- ▶ Call congressional offices directly or through the switchboard.
  - ▶ Or, call the district office (especially on Fridays or during recesses)
- ▶ Ask to speak to the aide who handles the issue you are interested in.
  - ▶ Don't expect to talk to the legislator.
  - ▶ If the aide is not available, leave a brief message.
- ▶ Let them know you are a constituent.
- ▶ If the legislator supports your position, express your appreciation and thanks.
- ▶ Be brief!

# Personal Meetings



- Very often the most effective lobbying effort.
- Make arrangements at least 3 weeks ahead for office visits.
  - Be aware that you will probably meet with an aide
  - Provide:
    - your name/address
    - who will be attending
    - when and where you want to meet (give alternatives)
    - how much time you need (not over 30 minutes)
    - the issue you want to discuss.
- Contact the scheduler a few days later to confirm details
- Follow-up after the meeting – thanks to legislator *and* staff involved, and provide additional info that was asked for.

# Testifying Before A Hearing



- ▶ Always be prepared before you give testimony.
  - ▶ Develop a comprehensive statement of your position
  - ▶ Get a rough vote count of how legislators are likely to vote
  - ▶ Try to find out about outstanding issues and concerns
  - ▶ Find out any requirements, e.g. how many copies of your statement, how many witnesses, time limits
- ▶ Choose witnesses who will be credible and effective:
  - ▶ people directly affected by the legislation or subject experts
  - ▶ high-ranking, well-informed volunteer in your organization
  - ▶ the chief staff officer or other senior staff of your group
  - ▶ individuals and organizations that represent legislators' constituents

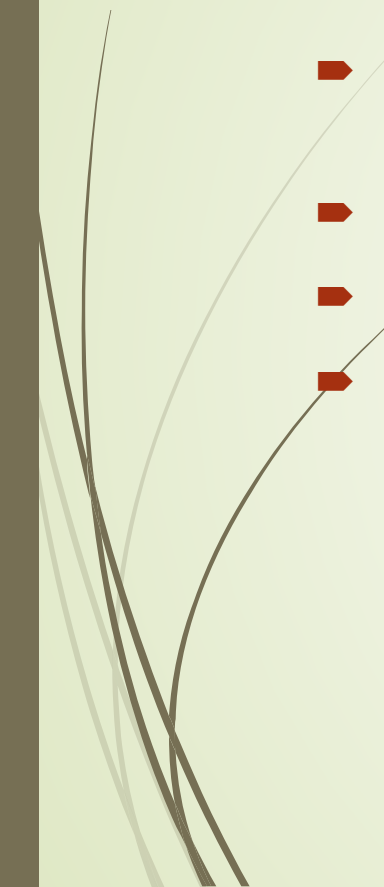


# Testifying Before A Hearing cont.

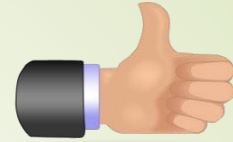
- Write out your testimony in advance.
  - Make sure that it is clear, concise, and persuasive.
  - Include personal stories whenever possible to show how the issue affects real people.
  - Give oral statements from a brief outline (not read); maintain eye contact with committee members.
  - Prepare a summary of your testimony for distribution at the hearing to legislators, the media, and other attendees.
  - Anticipate questions legislators might ask and plan how to respond.
- Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something – offer to provide the information after the hearing.
- Give friendly legislators questions for you, and responses to the opposing arguments.



# Testifying Before A Hearing cont.

- ▶ Get other groups to sign onto your testimony to strengthen the impact of your statement.
  - ▶ Consider bringing your supporters to be in the audience.
  - ▶ Ask committee members to vote in support of your position!
  - ▶ Follow up with legislators, both friendly and hostile.
- 

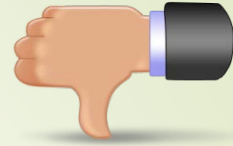
# Do's for Advocates



- Address the legislator properly and respectfully
- Know the status of the legislation, and refer to the bill number.
- Use your own words.
- Be brief and explicit, courteous and reasonable.
- Personalize your concerns: how will this bill/issue affect *you*.
- Write to say you approve, not just to criticize or oppose.
- Always keep off-the-record comments confidential.



# Don'ts for Advocates



- Don't begin with "As a citizen and tax payer..."
- Don't apologize for taking up their time – just be brief and use the time effectively.
- Don't be arrogant, condescending, blustering, or threatening towards the legislator or their staff.
- Don't argue with the legislator – just state your position.
- Don't get away from your talking points.
- Don't mention, hint, or imply anything about campaign contributions!



# Acknowledgement

This presentation was inspired by Jeremy Darrington's *Keeping Up with Congress* webinar (February 21, 2014), part of the North Carolina Library Association's *Help! I'm an Accidental Government Information Librarian* series,

A recording of that presentation is at <https://sas.illuminate.com/p.jnlp?psid=2014-02-21.0918.M.669FDEC58C8549C611C2EC64F0EDEE.vcr&sid=315> [Blackboard Collaborate format].

The presentation slides are at [http://www.nclaonline.org/sites/default/files/documents/gov/Webinars\\_KeepingCong\\_2%2021%202014.pdf](http://www.nclaonline.org/sites/default/files/documents/gov/Webinars_KeepingCong_2%2021%202014.pdf)