

# Using Congressional Committee Prints for Research

By Peter J. Egler

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## Introduction

Congressional committee prints are potentially useful research resources. This article explains the origin and purpose of committee prints, discusses their research uses, and reviews how to access them.

## What Are Congressional Committee Prints?

Congressional committee prints are the internal working papers of congressional committees. They are usually prepared by the committee staff. Committee prints are created in the course of the committee's efforts to understand and regulate its specific area of law. Committee prints are published in a variety of formats, including but not limited to the following:

- A study of a topic that is within the committee's jurisdiction
- The findings of a subcommittee, reported to the committee at large
- A compilation of laws under a committee's jurisdiction
- Internal committee rules
- Committee rosters

As these lists indicate, committee prints encompass a wide variety of documents.

## Congressional Committee Prints as Research Resources

Many committee prints deal with substantive topics and can be useful research resources. For example, these prints were recently issued by congressional committees:

- Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate, *Far from Home: Deficiencies in Federal Disaster Housing Assistance After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and Recommendations for Improvement* (Comm. Print 2009)
- Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *A Year After the March 2008 Protests: Is China Promoting Stability in Tibet?* (Comm. Print 2009)
- House Committee on Agriculture, House of Representatives, *Compilation of Responses to Climate Change Questionnaire* (Comm. Print 2009)
- Special Committee on Aging, U.S. Senate, *Target Date Retirement Funds: Lack of Clarity Among Structures and Fees Raises Concerns* (Comm. Print 2009)

These documents include data, analysis, and conclusions concerning their individual topics. They are potentially useful research resources, to be used in the same way as a relevant book or article.

Other committee prints cover procedural and internal matters, and are likely only useful to the authoring committee. Examples:

- House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, *Committee Rules of Procedure for the 111th Congress of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs* (Comm. Print 2009)

- Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, *Guide for Preparation of Committee Reports* (Comm. Print 2009)
- Staff of the Secretary of the Senate, *Committee and Subcommittee Assignments for the 111th Congress* (Comm. Print 2009)

### Are Congressional Committee Prints Useful as a Legislative History Resource?

Typical legislative history research involves collecting all legislative documents created during a bill's legislative journey, and then reviewing those documents to determine if their language indicates the legislature's intent when passing the law. Useful legislative history documents can include the original version of the bill, amended versions of the bill, transcripts of hearings related to the bill, reports from committees recommending the bill, *Congressional Record* entries concerning the bill, and conference committee reports explaining the final version of the bill.

Unlike the standard legislative history documents mentioned in the previous paragraph, most congressional committee prints aren't created as part of an individual bill's legislative journey. Congressional committee prints that deal with substantive issues are usually created by the committee's staff as part of the committee's information-gathering activities. The information included in the prints may lead to subsequent legislative action by the committee but the prints themselves are not usually connected to a particular bill. Congressional committee prints that aren't connected to a specific piece of legislation are not useful legislative history resources.

Occasionally committees will issue prints that contain analysis of specific pieces of legislation. These prints usually include the text of the legislation, along with some explanation of the legislation. For example, see the House Committee on Appropriations, *Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009* (H.R. 1105, Public Law 111-8) (Comm. Print 2009).

Congressional committee prints of this type would be a useful legislative history resource.

The Office of Law Revision Counsel ("the Office") is part of the House of Representatives. One of the responsibilities of the Office is to maintain the official *United States Code*. Occasionally the Office will reorganize or create new titles in the *United States Code* in order to incorporate new laws or remove repealed laws. The Office will frequently issue a print that explains the purpose of its reorganizations. Examples include the following:

- House Office of Law Revision Counsel, *Description of H.R. 4320, to Enact Title 41, United States Code, "Public Contracts"* (Comm. Print 2004)
- House Office of Law Revision Counsel, *Explanation of H.R. 3039, to Enact Title 51, United States Code, "National and Commercial Space Programs," as Positive Law* (Comm. Print 2005)

These prints would be useful to researchers interested in reorganizations of the *United States Code*.

### Accessing Congressional Committee Prints

Congressional committee prints aren't published on a regular schedule, and they don't have a consistent numbering system.<sup>1</sup> Despite these challenges, there are resources available that make congressional committee prints relatively easy to access.

The GPO website includes congressional committee prints for the 105th Congress (1997–98) forward. The current URL is <<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cprints/index.html>>. These materials are migrating in 2011 to GPO's new Federal Digital System (FDSys), <<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/home.action>>. The documents are available in ASCII text and, in some cases, in Adobe PDF. The GPO website allows researchers to browse or search the prints from the current Congress and search the prints from past Congresses.

Coverage in the LexisNexis Congressional Committee Print database starts in 1830. It contains PDF versions of many of the prints indexed in the databases. If the database doesn't include the full text of a print, it provides the CIS number for the print. The researcher can use this number to access a copy of the print on microfiche at a library that has the appropriate CIS microfiche set.

Examples of congressional committee print records found in the LexisNexis Congressional Committee Prints database include the following:

- House Committee on Naval Affairs, *Navy-Yards, Naval Stations, and Coaling Stations Belonging to Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia* (Comm. Print 1902). Note: The full text of this print is available in the LexisNexis Congressional database.
- House Committee on Ways and Means, *Report on Trade Mission to the Far East* (Comm. Print 1985), CIS 86-H782-1. Note: The full text of this print is not available in the LexisNexis Congressional database.

Hard-copy versions of some congressional committee prints have been distributed through the Federal Depository Library Program. The prints are usually cataloged by title. Keyword searches of individual library catalogs or the WorldCat database will yield relevant congressional committee prints. For example, if a researcher is interested in finding information about U.S. trade with foreign countries, he or she could run the keyword search "committee print foreign trade" in WorldCat. The following committee prints would be included in the search result:

- Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Uruguay Trade Preferences: A Strategic Opportunity in the Southern Cone* (Comm. Print 2009)
- House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Trade, *Report on Trade Mission to New Zealand and Australia* (Comm. Print 1999)
- House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Trade, *Written Comments on Extension of Unconditional Most-Favored-Nation Treatment to Mongolia and Laos* (Comm. Print 1997)

### Conclusion

Congressional committee prints document the information gathering activities of congressional committees. The prints that deal with substantive issues are potentially useful resources for researchers interested in those issues.

Today's researchers have access to congressional committee prints dating back to the early 1800s. While congressional committee prints from both recent and past sessions of Congress can be useful resources for current and historical information, most congressional committee prints are not useful resources for legislative history documents.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1983, Senate committees started numbering congressional committee reports from Senate committees. The standard citation includes the Congress and the print number. Example: *Iran: Where We Are Today*, S. Prt. 111-19 (May 4, 2009). The House committees don't use a numbering system for their prints.

There are some exceptions to this rule. Researchers interested in any topic involving government regulation should search for relevant committee prints from recent and past Congresses.

### **Additional Resources**

These websites contain additional information about congressional committee prints:

Harvard College Library, U.S. Congressional Publications, <[http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/guides/us\\_congressional/part5.html](http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/guides/us_congressional/part5.html)>

LexisNexis, Congressional Committee Prints, <[http://www.lexisnexis.com/help/CU/TP/Committee\\_Prints.htm](http://www.lexisnexis.com/help/CU/TP/Committee_Prints.htm)>

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The U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) and Google have entered a partnership to offer the public, for the first time, federal government titles in an e-book format. The titles will appear on Google's recently launched Google ebookstore, which can be searched, purchased and read on any connected device with a capable browser. Currently the public can search for titles such as the appendix for the *Budget of the United States, Fiscal Year 2011*, *Remembering the Space Age*, *Borden's Dream* (a history of Walter Reed Army Medical Center). GPO has about 100 titles in the catalog and will continue to add titles in the next several months, which will include the first volume of the *Public Papers of President Barack Obama* and the *Budget of the United States, Fiscal Year 2012*.

Link to Google's ebookstore to search for federal government titles: <<http://books.google.com/ebooks>>

—GPO Press Release, Dec. 14, 2010, available at <<http://www.gpo.gov/pdfs/news-media/press/10news46.pdf>>.