

Researching Current and Historical Legislation Using THOMAS

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Keeping track of legislation as it moves through Congress can be a daunting task, but fortunately the Library of Congress's THOMAS makes this challenge easier. Found at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>, THOMAS is a primary resource for current and past bill information. One can research the status of bills as they move through Congress and find sponsors, actions, committee reports and legislative text in various stages. For example, researchers can find timely information on the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010 and the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010.

In 1995, the Library of Congress launched THOMAS at the direction of Congress. The goal was to make federal legislation available to the public for free. Currently, THOMAS contains bills and legislation information from 1989 to present.¹

THOMAS has basic and advanced search features. Both are relatively simple to use. From the main page, users can search the current Congress by word/phrase or bill number. Alternatively, one can browse bills by sponsor using a drop-down menu of representatives and senators. The advanced search feature offers users the ability to search multiple Congresses simultaneously by words, phrases or bill numbers. Researchers can search specific or multiple Congresses by type of legislation, sponsor, House and Senate committee, or stage in Congress.

The Bill Summary & Status page provides a snapshot of the title, sponsor, related bills, latest major action and latest

action for the bill. If the bill becomes law, the summary screen displays the public law number and a link to the GPO text and .pdf of the law. A helpful tool is the link to "Major Congressional Actions," so the user can determine the bill's major actions without browsing through every bill action.

Military lawyers might also find the "Appropriations Bills" link from THOMAS' homepage especially useful. A chart for each year from 1998 to present includes committee actions on the Appropriations Bills, House and Senate committee reports and votes, and links to public laws. If the House and Senate votes are by roll call, there is a link to the votes by representative and senator. The charts also indicate whether the President signed a particular bill.

Finally, in addition to bill information, THOMAS has the *Congressional Record* searchable from 1989 to present. The *Congressional Record—Daily Digest* has summaries of the House and Senate day's activities. THOMAS also has presidential nominations from 1987 to present, and basic treaty information such as the short and formal titles, treaty number, and legislative actions from 1967 to present. Complete treaty coverage begins with the 94th Congress.²

Stay up to date with THOMAS and legislative activity by subscribing to the Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed or email updates at <http://www.loc.gov/rss/>.

For more information contact the Electronic Services Librarian at TJAGLCS-Digital-Librarian@conus.army.mil

¹ About THOMAS, http://thomas.loc.gov/home/abt_thom.html (last visited Dec. 20, 2010).

² See *id.*