An Insider’s View of Committee Prints and CRS Reports – the ProQuest® Congressional Research Digital Collection (CRDC)

What are Committee Prints and Congressional Research Service Reports?

One of the most overlooked areas of research in the history of legislation is the background material used by Congress – the committee prints and Congressional Research Service (CRS) Reports. Perhaps this is because we are results-oriented, and perhaps, like in The Wizard of Oz, we pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. And yet to find the information that Congress uses to make knowledgeable decisions, we do need to look behind that curtain.

Committee Prints

Very little has been written in the library literature or elsewhere about committee prints. Roger Haley, former Librarian of the Senate says, “to define the nature of committee prints is an even more difficult undertaking than to locate or obtain them. In fact, it is much easier to describe what they are not than what they are” (emphasis added). Haley goes on to note that committee prints are publications of Congressional committees, but they are not documents. Like hearings, committee prints are printed at the direction of the committee chairman. They may contain drafts of documents and reports, but they are not considered documents or reports.

An interesting exercise that highlights the difficulty facing a researcher of committee prints is to examine the development of the definition of what a committee print is, and the kind of material that is included under this designation. In his discussion of “other congressional publications,” Schmeckebier noted the problems of numbering and identification (2nd edition, 1939, p. 156). Joe Morehead echoed the same concerns in the second edition (1978) of his textbook, Introduction to United States Public Documents, some forty years later. He goes on to include a more informative description of committee prints and their availability:

Committee prints are publications prepared for the use and reference of a given committee, either as staff, or consultant research studies, activity reports, or compilations of materials of general interest. Many committee prints are working studies prepared in the course of formulating legislation, and as such are useful to legislators and the general public. (p. 176).

A testimony to the value of committee prints can be found in Steven Zink’s 1986 article, “Clio’s Blindspot”:

Other Congressional publications that are less frequently referred to are Congressional Committee Hearings and Committee Prints. These publications, at least for the historian of the twentieth century, are potentially some of the most important materials produced by the federal government. Congressional hearings are printed transcriptions of the record of testimony given by individuals appearing before Congressional committees…. Congressional committee prints are perhaps even more important in some respects. Committee prints are typically well-funded and meticulously researched monographs prepared by experts on a topic that a particular committee is investigating.

They contain a wealth of information and, frequently, an exhaustive bibliography. Although considered to be the working documents of Congress, widespread distribution of Congressional committee prints through the depository library system began only in the late 1970s.... (p. 69)

The third edition of Morehead (1983) comments “although more committee prints have been made available to depository libraries in recent years, the series is not automatically distributed. Under the ‘administrative or operational purposes’ provision of 33 U.S.C. 1902, a committee chairperson is not obligated to authorize all committee prints for distribution or sale. Moreover, the series is characterized by a pattern of discontinuity and inconsistency, and many of the individual issuances do not have numbering or series designations.” He goes on to note that “despite their somewhat erratic publishing and distribution pattern, they are valuable sources of information often not available in any other form” (p. 139).

By the sixth edition (1999) of Morehead, there is a more full-fledged description of what types of material are actually included in committee prints, and not just a description of publication patterns. “Prints consist of a wide variety of material, from legislative histories to bibliographies. Studies on topics of public policy, investigative reports, confidential staff memoranda, analysis of similar bills on a topic, and excerpts from hearings constitute some of the information” (p. 120).

The Help file in ProQuest® Congressional assists us in understanding prints by adding that the official committee prints publication category began when committees started to issue printed versions of their own internal working papers. Today, committee prints include a wide variety of publications approved and issued by committees or portions of committees, such as majority or minority staff, and may include anything relevant to the legislative and oversight functions of Congress. Content varies among committees and prints issued by only a portion of the committee are normally identified as such on the cover. The User Guide in the (1980) CIS® Congressional Committee Prints Index from the Earliest Publications Through 1969 describes the multiple categories of material, along with information about each category (see sidebar on p.3) and sample titles.

Since the Senate began numbering committee prints in 1983 (the House does not number its prints), there has been a steady decline in the number of prints issued in each Congress. The 98th Congress produced 294 prints while the 109th Congress has reached only 65 published prints to date. Both majority and minority offices of committees more readily rely on desktop publishing and avoid the official publication process. Thus, many “prints” are available only in electronic formats on committee web sites for as long as the offices wish to keep them posted. The materials published on committee web sites are included in CRDC, as well as the minority and majority staff reports.

Selection of Materials in Committee Prints

While the majority of the titles in this collection are monographs, there are several important periodicals:

- Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, 2000-present,
- Background Material and Data on Programs Within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means (also known as the Green Book), 1984-present,
- Country Reports on Economic Policy and Trade Practices, 1989-present,
- Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 1978-present,
- Economic Indicators, Joint Economic Committee, 1948-present,
- Economic Indicators, Joint Economic Committee, 1948-present,
- Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure, With Forms, 1968-present,
- Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, With Forms, 1990-present,
- Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure (for the U.S. District Courts), 1968-present, and

And there are many interesting monographs in the collection, including:

- False and Misleading Health Information Provided by Federally Funded Pregnancy Resource Centers, House Committee on Government Reform, Minority Staff Report. July 2006.
Types and Contents of Committee Prints Included

Subjects covered in prints reflect the range of committee concerns and responsibilities, and differing functions of various committees are reflected in the different kinds of prints they produce. For example, a strictly research-oriented committee like the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation, which was not empowered to conduct hearings, published prints very different from the prints produced by investigative committees like the House Committee on Un-American Activities. A number of basic types of committee prints predominate as the most common, however. These are characterized below.

- Monographic studies on topics of public concern. These prints form the largest group in the whole CIS committee prints collection. They are special studies on a particular subject or a broad topic directly or indirectly related to the committee’s responsibilities. The monographic studies are often prepared by expert consultants commissioned by the committee, by the research staff of the Legislative Reference Service (now Congressional Research Service) of the Library of Congress, or by the committee’s own researchers. They include studies like Alaska’s Vanishing Frontier; Apollo Program Pace and Progress; and Hydrogen Bomb and International Control: Technical and Background Information.

- Investigative field reports. These prints document the results of special investigations held by the committees, such as Investigation of Air Force Plane Crash at Morningside, Md. On Apr. 8, 1951. They also are the traditional publication form for reports on official study missions undertaken by committee members, such as East of the Elbe. Report by Sen. Joseph S. Clark on a Study Mission to Warsaw, Moscow, Belgrade, and Prague. Study mission reports vary from brief summaries of the itinerary and results of the mission to detailed accounts of economic or political conditions in various parts of the world.

- Section-by-section analyses of bills and comparative prints of bills. The latter prints compare provisions of proposed legislation with other legislative proposals or with existing law. The former prints analyze legislation and provide abundant cross references to the U.S. Code. These prints, which are used in the preliminary stage of the legislative process, are extremely useful to researchers in tracing the legislative intent of Congress. An example of this class is: Amendments to the Bank Holding Company Act of 1956. Analysis of S. 2353, S. 2418, and H.R. 7371, and Comparative Print Showing Changes in Existing Law.

- Confidential staff memoranda and reports. These prints supply timely information and analysis prepared for the immediate attention of committee members. Although most do not contain classified material dealing with national security or personal privacy, they sometimes do discuss sensitive issues. An example of the confidential committee memorandum issued in print format is the German Lumber Economy, an analysis drafted in 1947. Other confidential prints are preliminary drafts of important reports like that entitled India Emergency Assistance Act of 1951.

- Departmental reports on legislation or policy. Federal agencies are regularly requested by congressional committees to submit written comments on the merits of proposed legislation or public policy. A large number of Veterans Administration comments on individual bills were published as prints by the House committee on Veterans Affairs. The Maritime Commission supplied to the House Committee on merchant Marine and Fisheries a number of reports like Report of Maritime commission on H.R. 6061, 81st Congress (Bland) Relative to War Risk Insurance. Similar reports from other departments and agencies also appear in the collection, but in smaller volume.

- Hearings publications. Excerpts from hearings, digests of testimony presented at hearings, and even full texts of hearings (in revised or unrevised form) occur among the committee prints from the earliest days of congressional publications through today. The hearings texts in the prints collection range from multivolume hearings like those on the Tax Reform Act of 1969 to the two-page Extension of the Lend-Lease Act. Excerpts from Testimony of Col. Spencer B. Eddy, G.S.S. Office of the General Purchasing Agents of the U.S. Army Forces in the Far East, on H.R. 4254.

- Drafts of Reports and Bills. Preliminary drafts or reports, which may or may not have been issued in final report format, were often produced as working copies for committee discussion. Although such drafts were printed selectively by many committees, the most common preliminary prints of reports found by us were an appropriation bills before the House Committee on Appropriations, such as Department of Defense appropriation bill, 1967. Report to accompany H.R. -. Drafts of bills, frequently with successive revisions, were also commonly produced.


- Documents Related to the Investigation of Senator Robert Packwood (10 Volumes), Senate Select Committee on Ethics. 1995.


• Expenditures of the U.S. Government, 1791-1907. General Revenue; Postal Revenue; Per Capita Expenditure. Compiled by the Director of the Census, House Committee on Appropriations. 1908.


• Decouvertes Et Etablissements Des Francais Dans L’ouest Et Dans Le Sud De L’amerique Septentrionale, 1614-1754, Memoires Et Documents Originaux Recueillis Et Publies Par Pierre Margry. IV: Decouverte Par Mer Des Bouches Du Mississippi Et Etablissements De Lemoyne D’Iberville Sur Le Golfe Du Mexique (1694-1703) (Discoveries and Settlements of France in the West and South of North America, 1614-1754. Memoirs and Original Documents Collected and Published by Pierre Margry [In French]), Joint Committee on the Library. 1880.


• Review of Mr. Cambreleng’s Report from the Committee of Commerce. By Mephistopheles, House Committee on Commerce, 1830.

• Report Of The Committee On Commerce And Navigation [Cambreleng Report], House Committee on Commerce, 1830.

Finally, numbers often help us grasp the contents and breadth of a collection. In that light, here are some figures that provide another look into the contents of committee prints:

• 159 volumes are from the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC);

• 400+ are described as “background material” in the metadata;

• 500+ volumes have the word “chronology!” (chronology, chronologies, or chronological) in the metadata;

• 700+ volumes have the word “investigation” in their title;

• 600+ volumes have the words “legislative history” in their title or subject fields and 260 volumes analyze specific bills or laws;

• 1400+ volumes are authored by the Office of Technology Assessment (Note: OTA’s work is included in approximately 1000 additional reports for which it is not listed as the author);

• 2000+ volumes contain the word “bibliography or bibliographies” in the subject field; and

• 7500+ volumes include the subject “statistical data.”

**CRS Reports**

In contrast to the committee prints, much more has been written about CRS Reports and CRS itself. The CRS web site (www.loc.gov/crsinfo/whatscrs.html#about) says the “Congressional Research Service is the public policy research arm of the United States Congress. As a legislative branch agency within the Library of Congress, CRS works exclusively and directly for Members of Congress, their committees and staff on a confidential, nonpartisan basis.” The sixth edition of Morehead states, “CRS, sometimes called the ‘personal librarian’ of members and their committee staffs, does in-depth research providing essential background information for congressional investigations and legislative proposals” (p. 170).

CRS Reports are mostly brief (more than 95 percent are fewer than fifty pages in length) reports and are often iterations of previous reports. For example, there are more than forty reports on the strategic petroleum reserve (SPR) program. These are issued irregularly, but when need arises they may be updated with great frequency. While the first version, Strategic Petroleum Reserve, appeared in the collection in 1981, the report was updated ten times in 2005. This indicates a committee or a member of Congress is greatly interested in the SPR – perhaps the cost of a gallon of gas was a motivation as there are also fifteen reports on
gasoline prices in 2005. The frequent updating indicates that there were repeated requests, and that CRS wanted the requester to have the most up-to-date information they can provide. A search on the publication number IB87050 brings up all of the editions of that particular report.

CRS Reports are well known for their research value, and indeed, many make their way into the “sunshine” as committee prints. Individual members of Congress or full committees may post reports on their web sites, and there are collections available on the Internet. One of the better known of these collections, the OpenCRS collection, (www.opencrs.com/about.php) claims to index just over 10,700 reports (as of September 13, 2006) though some of these reports may be housed in other locations.

What often frustrates researchers is the lack of a systematic way that CRS Reports are made available to the public. In a March 9, 1999, statement, the Federation of American Scientists’ web site notes, “At present, CRS is precluded by law from general public distribution of its materials without prior approval by one of its two congressional oversight committees. This restriction results from a limitation that has appeared in CRS’ annual appropriations acts in each year since FY 1952” (http://fas.org/sgp/crs/policy.html). If a researcher happens to know of the existence of a report, it can be requested through a congressional office; otherwise, the researcher is out of luck.

CRS Authors

The CRS web site claims that the CRS staff comprises nationally recognized experts in a range of issues and disciplines, including law, economics, foreign affairs, public administration, the social, political, and information sciences, and natural sciences. The breadth and depth of this expertise enables CRS staff to come together quickly to provide integrated analyses of complex issues that span multiple legislative and program areas (www.loc.gov/crsinfo/whatscrs.html#about).

Authors are assigned to divisions within CRS. The number of divisions in CRS, as well as their names, has changed over the years. The 1978 report, The Congressional Research Service of the U.S. Congress (CRS-1978-ODR-0001) lists seven divisions within CRS: American Law, Economics, Education and Public Welfare, Environmental and Natural Resources Policy, Foreign Affairs and National Defense, Government, and Science Policy Research. However, according to the CRS web site, they now have five divisions: American Law; Domestic Social Policy; Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade; Government and Finance; and Resources, Science and Industry, and the Knowledge Services Group. Each of these divisions is further divided into sections, but the title pages of the reports list only the researcher’s division. Searching CRDC by divisions of CRS yields large, diverse, result sets.

The authors of CRS Reports are subject specialists, and indeed, if you search the name of a particular specialist, you will find other reports in the same subject area by that author. For example, the authors of the report Libraries and the USA PATRIOT Act (CRS-2006-AML-0035, February 3, 2006) are Charles Doyle and Brian T. Yeh in the American Law Division.

- Charles Doyle, author from 1970 forward, has more than 180 reports in the database, covering such topics as police forcible entry, wiretapping and electronic eavesdropping, Internet gambling, national security letters in foreign intelligence investigations, and many other reports on aspects of the USA PATRIOT Act.

- Brian Yeh has been authoring reports since 2003 and his topics include file-sharing software and copyright infringement, physician-assisted suicide and the Controlled Substances Act, and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, though more than half of the titles he has published to this point are on aspects of the USA PATRIOT Act, and more.

CRS experts are known nationally and internationally for their work. A brief sampling includes the following:

- Charles Doyle has testified numerous times before Congress, is listed as an author of committee prints, and has written reports that have been published as books.
• Louis Fisher, listed as Senior Specialist, Separation of Powers in several hearings, is the author of numerous CRS Reports, has testified before Congress on multiple occasions, and has had his articles inserted into hearings and included in House documents and of course in committee prints. In addition to all the citations in congressional literature, he has published articles in the Texas Law Review and several times in Presidential Studies Quarterly.

• Harold C. Relyea has also published numerous CRS Reports, is published in Government Information Quarterly, and is the author of a number of books including co-authored textbook United States Government Information: Policies and Sources (Englewood CO.: Libraries Unlimited, 2002).

Selection of Materials in CRS Reports

There are several categories of CRS Reports that are interesting to librarians and researchers:

States: States are often used as subject terms, so a search by state name as a subject will bring up a list of reports pertaining to interests in that state.

Chronologies: More than 900 reports contain chronologies (to find these, search for “chronologies” in the subject field). Some are chronologies of events within a particular Congress such as Trade Negotiations during the ... Congress. Others are subject-oriented, like the reports on the SPR, which contain a chronology of events beginning in 1977 (when the first crude was pumped into the reserve) up through the date the report was issued. Chronologies often contain bill and public law numbers for legislation pertaining to the topic at hand.

Bibliographies: More than 1000 reports contain bibliographies (to find these, search for “bibliographies” in the subject field). While some are brief, referencing other CRS Reports and web sites, others may be resource lists like Hispanic Heritage: Bibliography-in-Brief, (CRS-1995-LSV-0044). The report, Golan Heights (CRS-1995-FND-0025) has a list of selected readings included and Japan-U.S. Relations: A Briefing Book (CRS-1992-FND-0058) includes over twenty pages of selected readings.


Hot Topics: If it’s in the press or if Congress is talking about it, there may be a report. Topics that come quickly to mind are the gasoline prices (previously discussed), right-to-die issues (“Right to Die”: Constitutional and Statutory Analysis, CRS-2005-AML-0119) and Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Katrina is an interesting study – in September 2005 alone, there were forty-six different reports that referenced various issues relating to the hurricane. From contracting opportunities to food assistance to emergency supplemental appropriations, Congress wanted to know and CRS provided background.

Origins of the ProQuest® Congressional Research Digital Collection (CRDC)

CRDC is available in two parts: the retrospective collection, covering 1830-2003, and the current (prospective) collection, covering 2004 to date. However, the CRS Reports and committee prints collections have different origins.

The retrospective digital collection is comprised of the contents of several different microfiche compilations. These include

• the historical committee prints microfiche collections (1830-1969) from the Greenwood Press collection of committee prints from the U.S. Senate Library and selected House and Senate Committees (approximately 4,100 prints);
• the general collection of the Library of Congress, the National Archives Library, and selected congressional committee offices (approximately 1000 prints); and
• an additional segment is a CIS® collection filmed from major libraries and collections, comprising some 10,000 additional prints (see pages x-xi of the CIS® U.S. Congressional Committee Prints Index for the complete list of sources).

Since 1970, the committee prints have been systematically collected, indexed and microfilmed at the time of acquisition, negating the earlier challenges of assembling a complete collection long after publication.
In addition to the official committee prints, the digital collection also includes other congressional publications that are not issued by committees but that contain research value content similar to the content contained in committee prints. This includes publications of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Congressional Budget Office, the former Office of Technology Assessment, and, of course, those materials now available only on committee web sites.

The CRS Reports have their history in the UPA Major Studies and Issue Briefs collection with its historical collection covering 1916-1989. The historical collection included more than 5000 reports, and the annual supplements that followed covered 700-900 reports annually. The Major Studies... series was never intended to be a comprehensive collection, and our editors have identified approximately 12,000 additional reports to be indexed and added to the retrospective collection over the next year, creating a retrospective collection of approximately 30,000 reports. For the prospective (current) collection, we anticipate 5000-6000 CRS Reports added to the collection annually.

It is important to note that many reports by CRS authors are published as committee prints. So as not to confuse the users, this material will be found in both categories - committee prints and CRS Reports - within CRDC.

Your Window into Congressional Research - Why CRDC is so Valuable

Who doesn’t need their research done for them? Indeed, why should I research something myself when CRDC provides much of the background information – that window into the Congressional thought process – that I need? For example, if you need to explain the hearings process to students – from scheduling witnesses up through the editing of testimony – CRDC provides the background. Do you want to know about field hearings? Check out Field Hearings: Fact Sheet on Purposes, Rules, Regulations, and Guidelines, CRS-2006-GVF-0110.

Are you curious about how those contracts between Halliburton and the federal government are going? CRDC has the updates in the committee prints. And how about Enron? It’s there too. Are you looking for the first version of the Geneva Convention on treatment of prisoners of war? There is a CRS Report with the citation in CRDC, as well as related committee prints with background on American POWs during and after World War II. Just reviewing the examples used in the document sparks thoughts in all areas in which this collection is useful.

Pulling it Together

One good example of the value of CRDC is its ability to pull together background information on a topic. The recently reauthorized Voting Rights Act is a good example of the power of the indexing, as a search in ProQuest Congressional on the term “voting rights act” brings up over 200 publications. Of these, some twenty-two are CRS Reports including:

About fifteen are committee prints, including:


Both types of publications inform users and provide background and research in a way that other material does not. Included are compilations of the law, overviews of the law at different points in time, and different issues that have come up relating to the law. The record for the second CRS Report, Voting Rights Act of 1965, As Amended: Its History and Current Issues includes, as part of the bibliographic record, citations to five public laws.

Because CRDC materials are mapped to bill numbers, public laws, and Statutes at Large citations, researchers can be quite specific in their search strategies. Instead of finding all of the materials relating to the Voting Rights Act (which includes materials from the 1950s up through the reauthorization in 2006), users can search on P.L. 89-110 and review just the material that relates to the 1965 legislation.

**CRDC and the ProQuest® Congressional Interface**

Contributing to the power of the individual digital collections is the shared interface. Depending on what your organization purchases, the researcher can have access to both full-text and abstracts of all congressional publications including CRS Reports, committee prints, Serial Set documents, hearings and more, all with just one search. For example, a search on the Voting Rights Act (all available dates) brings up an answer set that includes 22 CRS Reports, 24 committee prints, 5 documents, 31 reports, 111 hearings (both published and unpublished), more than 300 items from the Serial Set Digital Collection, and 12 legislative histories. Other searches on legislative topics bring up similar results.


**Bibliography**


