GPO - An Orientation to Congress.gov - Transcript

Please stand by for realtime captions.
Good afternoon and welcome to today's webinar. We will be getting started in about seven minutes.
We will be getting started in about three minutes.
Good afternoon and welcome to the orientation for Congress.gov. From the law library of congress we have Barbara . She is a graphic and research instruction librarian. Robert from the external relations Library of Congress. I will turn it over to Barbara and Robert. Thank you.
Thank you. Okay let me go ahead and share my screen with you.
So the site that you may have been familiar with has been replaced. Congress.gov is a lot of things that Thomas could not. For one thing, it uses responsive web design to scale to whatever device you are using. Whether that is a tablet, desktop, or phone. It is also intended to be much more browsable than Thomas. You can start with a broad search and use filter menus to narrow down the results. To get started
you notice by default you are looking at the global search box. You are searching the current Congress only. All collections on Congress.gov for the 117th Congress which is the current Congress. You can search all collections and all congresses. You can search the legislation. You can select particular collections such as legislation, committee materials
and reports the community schedule and limited number of committee transcripts the congressional record. If you are not familiar with that is a record of the debates in Congress. Members, member profile pages that will talk about that a bit later. And executive nominations. In addition to searching you can also browse content on Congress.gov. If you go up here to the top with browse the first thing you do is pick the Congress that you want to browse. I will stick with the 117th. Then you choose the collection you are interested in browsing. You can browse legislation by subject. There are two subject vocabularies that are assigned to legislation by the Congressional research service. Policy of subjects, this is a vocabulary of a little over 30 terms. Only one policy area subject can be assigned to this legislation. These are topics you might expect. For example maybe you are interested in researching legislation on civil liberties and the current Congress this would be a good choice to go, a good entry point for you. The legislative subject vocabulary is a broader vocabulary. The first important thing to note is that more than one legislative session term can be assigned a piece of legislation unlike the policy area subjects.
A legislative subject vocabulary is much broader policy area. You also have geographic entities, so if you are interested in legislation that impacts a particular place this might be a place for you and organization names. Organization names using governmental entities. If you are interested in that there is a good entry point. But needs the global search box I want to point out that you have the most bills that are capturing the greatest amount that is used on a given week. Sometimes you see that they are open to 117th but sometimes you will see they don't always have to be from the current Congress. If you click on the top 10, there is an archive going back to 2014. Families such as analysts are topics that are pretty significant to our patrons. You can browse this legislation by sponsor. So first, choose the letter then you go down on the start of the left and continue to the right. If you have access to bills that person has sponsored, cosponsored, if you want to look at prior congresses you can use the strap on. Look here at legislation introduced in the current Congress, this will take you to the U.S. code. If you are not familiar with that it is legislation that has been categorized by subject. The subjects correspond to the titles. At the bottom you have appropriations. Trying to make it easy for you to attract this legislation by breaking up the legislation at the tables. The first thing that you do is pick the fiscal year and just a reminder this fiscal year begins in October and ends September 30. You click on this and she is at 421 for the fiscal year, scroll down start over here on the left with the bill and then continue to the right as it goes to the legislative process. You will find things like these conference reports that you want to look at with the

appropriations legislation. You are looking at regularly appropriations. Also, continuing resolutions or continuing appropriations. Supplemental legislation and the budget resolution. Another thing people typically look for when they are researching. This will show you all of the updates that have been made to this appropriation table. At the bottom you will see this report right here. Next thing I want to talk about his committee pages. If you go up to the top. Here I will choose agriculture. So this committee has a link to the live and archived video of meetings and this is particularly important because it takes a while. If you are looking for something recent you might want to go watch the video for the transcript printed. Most people will go to find committee reports and other publications. This filter menu is what you see on the left. This allows you to start with a really broad search or even just use the filters to narrow down your results. For example, they are interested in reports from the hundred and 16th Congress I have already narrowed down the results to two and you can get rid of these limits at the top of the screen. I also want to point out what you have sort options right here to for results. Next let's talk about current legislative act to release. Here you have a link to the house and Senate are in session. These items underneath for their constitutional role. You have executive nominations and treaties. The go ahead and click on the executive foundations. Here again talking about the filter menu, so maybe I am only interested in the executive nominations from the 117th Congress that pertain to military. Go ahead and click on those filters. I have already narrowed down my results quite a bit that I can search within the current set by clicking search within. I will go ahead and search for this" so it is the exact phrase.

 You can see I have already narrowed down the results to 13. That's just another example of how you can use the filters in combination with search to narrow down your results and of course there is the sort option there. All right. Next let's talk about reports that are available. You have two types of reports. Congressional research service reports and that provides objective nonpartisan advice to Congress and you can access those reports on the site. If you want to browse through you can leave the search box blank and click search. Then we are going to pull up a menu similar to the filter menu you see on Congress.gov. One of the frequently popular filters is topic. One thing that I want to point out is that sometimes you will see this little clock icon next to the Congressional research service report. They update the report so that if you want to see prior versions of the report you click on the clock icon and you can see prior versions. Also, all Library of Congress reports. Each report takes an issue such as the regulation and discusses how countries around the world are proposing legislation of that issue. You can have different access points. You can browse for personal topic, region, publication, or simply browse all of them. Let's talk about member profile pages. Let's go ahead and choose an example so up at the top the first thing you notice is the contact information. If they have ever changed chambers in their career. You can see that represented and at the bottom you will see the biography. We do have member profile pages for retired members so if you are looking for previous members you can click on the biography and that will tell you where you can find the pages. If you want more on the member you can click to see congressional record. That will filter to articles where the members spoke and supported congressional record. More frequently asked about his members committee assignments. You can get to that but what most people use this page for us to find legislation sponsored or cosponsored by a particular board member. You have this filter menu. Right now there's are ready for thousand results. For example, maybe you are interested in sponsored legislation by this member in the 117th Congress and already narrowed down the results to five. Again, you can go ahead and sort your results over here. One more thing I want to point out member profile pages is you can get alerts. You can sign up for a free account. Here you can get an alert every time it sponsors legislation. I also want to talk about the Constitution annotated by the professional research service. It is written by the Congressional research service and summarizes constitutional provisions and the leading Supreme Court decisions that interpreted. You can browse or search. I will go ahead and browse this is an invaluable place to begin your research. I will choose tax exemptions on oldest properly and show you what an article looks like.

At the top you have the constitutional provision and then you have a nice short article summarizing leading Supreme Court decisions that have interpreted it. If you go to the bottom you will see in the footnotes that they cite the cases they are relying upon anything click to get access of the case. Some other helpful content for the Constitution annotated site you have featured issues which are articles on issues that are current events and the Constitution annotated resources. There are two tables that we frequently use. The table and Supreme Court decisions overturned by decisions is very helpful and in addition to that this is another table that we frequently use. Okay. Another thing that I want to point out is the legislative process failures. For a quick refresher on that fewer teaching a political science or law this is a great place to go for an overview of the legislative process this is written by the Congressional research service. They go into detail but they are still pretty brief. We have also translated the overview of legislative process into Spanish each video has a transcript at the bottom. So if you go to supports and browse the help center so this will tell you by document type what is included. For example, this goes back to 1993. Two exciting things that I want to point out that we actually just released, we recently migrated our content

from our lawmaking site that you might be familiar with. We migrated the bills and resolutions from that site to Congress.gov. That collection includes built-in resolutions from 1799 to 1873. You will now find that in Congress.gov. In addition the congressional record we have been working her way back to add more content and that actually goes back to 1929 so we are continuing to add more back content and keep an eye on our blog where we issue release notes to let you know more content. Next I want to talk about advanced searches on Congress.gov. Click on advanced searches at the top and this is the advanced legislation search form. It is pretty self-explanatory. Refill in the different fields. The legislation of lawmen numbers and you can type in the citation here, words and phrases. Maybe you want to have a bill or resolution. Subjects that we spoke about earlier. Actions, and the legislative process. Sponsor, cosponsor, also associated committee. We will talk about that for builder. The ultimate example search because it is a little bit myself explanatory. Service you can search for the affordable care act assuming that you only know the title and sponsor of the Congress. So go ahead and strike that search and choose legislation Congress is, all congresses. You know the title so you will go ahead and choose that for the field.. You can search for the title as a phrase. Now I need to add another line so that I can add my sponsor. I click on the plus and then I will choose the sponsor field and search for the sponsor as well. If you type the first few letters and try to auto complete so there is the patient section of the affordable care act. That is how you use the query builder. I also want to talk briefly about the search tools page. The search up your readers you can use. You can use this bully in style operators here if you want to search for something with an exact phrase with quotation marks around it you can say and in capital letters. The proximity search so if you want to search for enhanced terms with this is how you would do it little bit different than what you would see in the research databases. The trends in quotation marks and teams and specify the numbers of turn. I also have wildcards that I want to point out. If you wanted to search for women you can use the?. This is the one that you would use to search for so if it is appropriations you can use the*. With that I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to Barbara who is going to take you into the legislation.

Thank you. I am also going to share my screen so just give me one moment. Hopefully you are seeing my screen right now. I would like to go over a few sample searches to try and kind of help with everything that Robert talk about together in one place. Will focus first on legislative searches, then we can talk about the Congressional record and committee reports because those are the main things we get asked about the most at the reference desk. I wanted to use an example for the legislation search. It is a bill that has actually been in that most viewed bills list a couple times already this year. From the current Congress and actually recently passed the house called the paycheck fairness act. I could do this multiple different ways. I can use that query builder like Robert to stop at a moment ago. What I will do is use what I call the legislative quick search. I will do that clicking the link on the global search box. If

you click that link you will have a couple different options for quick searches your on the left-hand side. I am searching legislation so I will just remain in that legislative quick search. I will type in the keyword here paycheck fairness act. You will notice that there is an option to also include the bill text in the search. If you are just starting out with the searching and you are not sure whether or not it is actually called the paycheck fairness act or if that is just kind of the short title or something that people are using on everyday language you can select the included bill text in this section that will include the text of the bill and all of the different versions that have lived through Congress. It kind of gives you a little more coverage in terms of your search terms. I will cast my net widely and include this in this search and look a little bit further down on the screen. Now, I am pretty sure that this will was considered in the Congress because I heard in the news that it passed the house but if I was a little less sure of myself I could also cast my net widely and choose all congresses. I have expanded my search as much as possible including bill text and all congresses. I want to show you an example of what it is like to use those filters that Robert talk about before. I will hit search. You will notice I get over 140 search results. I want to know if you get thousands of search results when you do your search on Congress.gov that does not mean you have done something wrong or it is a bad search. What I would suggest is looking for the left-hand side of your screen and using the filter menus that you see there to narrow down your shirt results. Before I start narrowing down the results the first thing that I want to do is click the button right underneath the search box here called show tracker. That tracker option will give you at a glance information about how far each bill has gotten in the Congress or got before the end of the session. You will notice here, these couple bills at the top of my search results are from the current Congress and they have just been introduced. They have not passed the house and the Senate Oregon further. You will notice that introduced will be highlighted and there will be an arrow at the end of that highlighted box is the bill is still being considered. Of the bill was from a prior Congress and died in the prior Congress, there will be a straight line after the highlighted box that will show you this is how far it got in Congress and it ended here. Next I will come over to the filters. I also want to note one other thing. If you go to the top of your screen, let me annotate this because I'm not sure you can see that if you come appear to the top of the screen you can

sort by different items. Right now it is sorted by date of introduction or the bill resolution. If I wanted to change that to a relevancy search I could do that very easily. That will be based on the search results.. If I wanted to narrow down the search results to under 140 what I would do is narrow by Congress. I just have a good idea that the bill is being considered in the current Congress which is the 117th so I will narrow down to 117. You will see that it takes me down to over 100 and 80 the 15 search results which is great. If I like this search and I want to keep it and save it for later and maybe set up alerts on the search all I have to do is set up an account. I am already signed into my account because of the top of my screen that is my username. Accounts are free. All we need is your name and your email address it will have to be an email that you check because he will have to confirm the email address. Keep that in mind. Then you can set up safe searches and email alerts on your saved searches and other items. If I wanted to save the search on the would have to do is come up to the top left side of the screen and click save the search and give the search a title and click save. Sorry, I already used this. I will say 100 and 17. So if I wanted email alert any time I search results changed and because I use that legislative quick search at the beginning that allows me to then limit which things I would like to be alerted about. I will get alerted every time a new bill is added to my search results but from there if I wanted to be alerted any time any bill in the search results list has an action taken I could click action here I will get an email alert any time the search either adds a new bill or any actions are taken on the bill in my search results. If you get tired of getting these search alerts or you get a project another project is over and you want to clear out the kind of emails you are getting all you have to do is cut up to the account and click alerts and then I can just cancel my alert. So I have canceled both of my paycheck fairness act alerts. It is just that easy. You can do the same thing for your saved searches as well. If you want to delete saved

searches you come up to the account and click saved searches and cancel. I want to do one more thing before I leave the alerts page. Notice you can consolidate your saved search results. Instead of getting an email every time something changes in one of your search alerts you can just get one email if you choose to consolidate.. If I wanted to download my search results it is very easy. I click download results on the first thousand results in my search will be downloaded as a CSV file. That opens up in something like Excel then you see a spreadsheet of your search results. Now that we have figured out how to do that

, when I want to show was one other way we can narrow down our search results there's a couple of paycheck fairness act and the 127 Congress -- 117th Congress. That is perfectly normal but if I am only interested in the one that past the house I could go to the status of legislation menu. So I will click past one chamber and that will take me down so this is the one interested paycheck fairness act

 for HR seven. You can also narrow down. That is the committees that have dealt with the bill of interest.. Each bills status page will look similar to what you see here. There will be an overview box at the top of your screen. There will be information about the policy areas subject to and assigned to the bill. There will be information about the constitutional authority statement and cost estimates. The Congressional Budget Office produces cost estimates for different major versions of bills as it moves the Congress. If they create a report about the financial effect of the bill, you will see those reports linked here and that will take you to the webpage where you can download their cost estimate. If you are interested in this will or you want to talk to a member of Congress were representative. You can click contact your member here or it will take you to a screen where you can figure out who your members of Congress are and how you can contact them. I should mention the overview box. That is kind of at a glance information about the bill that we can asked about the most. So what committees have dealt with this Bill and have they had meetings or did they have meetings and are there any reports that are created by congressional committees and what is the latest action taken on the bill. Those kinds of things will be in the overview box at the top of your screen. If you want to do more about the bill you can scroll down and see the tabs in the middle of your screen here for those of you that use Thomas in the past these are kind of like those links that you would see on a bill.. First it would default to CRS summaries or Congressional research service summaries. It does short summaries on each major version of the bill as it moves the Congress. As you can see here, if I wanted to see a summary of the bill as it was introduced instead of the version that past the house,

 you can use that menu and select that option I could click the play button here read under the summary tab next I will come over to this text tab and that has the drop-down menu and the option to listen to the page. Instead of summaries it has the different text of the bill as it moves through. It has, for instance, the version that was introduced, the version that was in the house, the version that got sent to the Senate and was placed on the Senate calendar. You can see the things that have changed on those different versions as it moves through. You can select different versions if you want to kind of see the differences. It will open up in either XML, HTML format or text format automatically. You will see you here if there are links to United States code sections that are being dealt with in the bill or maybe links to sections of the act diversion will actually link you to those items. This will take you directly to that U.S. court citation that it is to. Another thing you will see as I am kind of weaving my cursor over different sections of the bill is that we now have deep linking. If I wanted to leave somebody to a subsection of a bill or an act instead of linking them to the entire text of an act this could be really helpful if you have a very large multi-hundred page bill and you only want to link someone to a subsection. All you have to do is mouse over to the right-hand side of your screen and then click share this. It will copy the link to just this subsection onto your computer and then you can send the direct link to somebody else if you like or save it so that you are taking directly their instead of having to kind of scroll through

. We also frequently at this point get asked about citation information said we recently added leading to different sites so if you wanted to link this page through Google format, APA, Chicago manual all you

have to do is come up to the top of the page here and there is a citation link. Coming over to the actions tab, this is the one we get asked about the most from researchers that are trying to research a bill. That is because of the actions tab can have everything that has happened to a bill as it moves through Congress. If you come over to the left hand side and click all actions. Once you click all actions you will notice that it takes man's actions that have been taken on this bill and it creates filter menus on the left side of the screen. If you are only interested in what happened in committees that have dealt with the bill, you could check all under committees. We only have house committees because of Senate committee has not looked at this bill yet. That he will see it limits to just the house committees that have dealt with the bill and if there is a house or Senate committee report that is in the database we will link you to that report as well I will uncheck this. Another thing I like to point out is that you can also go directly to budding information. I will click check all under roll call votes. You will see a couple of different things here. First of all, we link you to the house and Senate pages where you can find record vote information and roll call vote information. I will click on this one and open it in a different tab so you can see I have now opened the roll call vote for HR seven. You can see broken down by party and by member who voted on this bill and how they voted. That goes back to the late 1980s and early 1990s. 89, 90. You can see the information linked directly here. If instead you want to see debate or voting information on the bill as it appears in the congressional record, you will see that there are little notes that say CR and then link you to a page in the congressional record. We have the daily edition of the congressional record loaded and if I open it in a new tab, it will take you directly to the issue of the congressional record on which you can find the voting information for this act and a link to the actual article and then you see the text there or you can open up a PDF page of the congressional record. I want to note here, every PDF you will open up is searchable by keyword
. The way that you can do that is to use the find feature. I have a PC so I hit control as. I believe in Apple devices it is command F. It opens up a search at the bottom of the screen and I can type in paycheck and it will show me every time paycheck is mentioned
 in this PDF. That is true for any PDF you will access through Congress.gov. Here you can also see information about the paycheck fairness act and then any kind of voting information as well. All right. Going back to the actions I will uncheck that. You will see congressional record pages will be cited throughout the actions tab. Coming over the titles, this tab is particularly helpful for larger bills. Sometimes you are dealing with appropriations bills or large bills like that they can kind of gobble up smaller bills and they become titles of the larger bill. The titles tab puts in one place kind of all of the different titles has to refer to the bill at hand so any smaller bills that can be gobbled up by this larger bill and passed as part of this larger bill. We don't have as many examples of this because it is a smaller bill but you will see short title information will be listed here
. If any of those smaller bills became a short title of this larger bill. That way it shows up in the search results so if you search for a smaller bill that might have been gobbled up we can also be searching this titles page. Amendments. These are floor amendments. You can see here these are on the left-hand side of the page so if you are only interested in amendments that were agreed to by the house you can narrow down to those. That if you are interested in seeing the amendment itself, click on the amendment link and it will tell you which bullets related to, the sponsor of the amendment and the latest action taken on the amendment and the end text information which links it to the congressional record pages where you can see the text of the amendment. We get some questions sometimes about how many cosponsors there are of a bill. Typically people want to break down the cosponsors by state. We want to do what members of Congress from their state data regarding a bill. You can do that simply on the left-hand side so if you are interested in, say, Virginia
 you can see which members from Virginia cosponsored the Bill. You can also narrow down by party as well. Under committees. If there are any related documents, particularly committee reports they will also give you information if there was a hearing held, when the hearing was held, so that you can track

that down as well. Finally, related bills. As I'm sure you all know usually there will be a companion bill that was introduced in the other chamber if there is a companion bill or closely related bills similar to that it will show up in the related bills temp. It will link you to that bill summary and status page. Is the companion bill and another bill with identical language that did not end up passing the house if you are interested in that. Of there was a companion bill in the Senate that would be lifted here as well. It will also tell you the latest action taken on that related bill. One thing that I want to note about related bills, however, is these are related bills from the Congress in which the bill is considered. These will only be related bills from the 117th Congress. If you have to do a search for related bill from a prior Congress you will probably want to do more of a keyword search to find that information. That is a general overview of this page. Sometimes we do not get asked about particular bills. We are being asked about members of Congress Robert showed you earlier the members pages. That is a great place to look to see if a member of interest introduced the Bill. Another way to find out information about what a member of Congress might have to say about a topic is to search the congressional record you will notice at that side of your screen we can see the condition of the congressional record each day so again this is going to be, I don't know if it will be the most up-to-date on record. You can use the congressional record on and that so we do have

 indexing terms on the congressional record which you can use here. You what I might suggest is also doing a keyword search. I can choose congressional record at the source and I am going to do a search. I think it has a lot of great options to it. That is one of the ranking members but currently the chair of the House committee on science, space, and technology had to say about the funding of that. The chair of the committee is the representative Johnson. There are a couple of different moving parts here. The place to start would be just to do a wide search for NASA. I know you are probably sitting there saying, that is too broad and that is okay because I will use filters to narrow down the results. I have over 12,000 results. I am interested particularly in the funding. I will use that wildcard that Robert mentioned earlier. That will bring funding, funds, fund, et cetera that will bring me down, not just a huge amount that 2000 is not that bad. I will use that filters menu. I am particularly interested in what Bernice Johnson has to say. I will click on show more under health

. I will click Jennifer Johnson and pictures from the list. If I were interested in particular in this first one there is that option. It will had a text percentage if you want to see the PDF of that. If you want to see the PDF version of these pages in the congressional record you just click the link and you can scroll from there. You can do this for searching and if I wanted to see every time Ms. Johnson was mentioned I can do that as well.

 I am nearing the end. I want to leave some time for questions but I just want to do one more search and that is for the congressional committee reports that I talked about before. Sometimes people just want to see this topic instead of how did they create a report on the bill. If we are interested more in just -- somebody was interested in the funding of the national geological and geophysical program. There was a bill from the 116th Congress where they talk about the funding of that program. I will do an example here and use the pulldown menu. I will try not to misspell it but if I do that will be my fault for picking that one. I could search for this program. I can search for this program and do a phrase search to just one of that a little bit. That is urging all of those words in that order [Indiscernible] I am not interested in meeting the publications and then I can also limit by Congress. I am interested in the 116th Congress. That narrows down the search results. I can look into the reports of how that is discussed. I will show you what that looks like. You will see the report tells you which bill the reported company, which committee created this report. This is probably one that I would be interested in looking at seeing what they are talking about. That is an overview of Congress.gov. Before I headed over to questions, please put them in the chat box and we are happy to look at them. One thing that I want to note if you scroll down to the bottom of Congress.gov you will notice this kind of screen at the bottom is always going to

be available and one thing you might want to mention or look at here is your help feature. That will be here at the top of your screen but particularly I want to note, ask

 a law library and pick up you are doing a search, you are having issues finding the results that you know should be there, these feel free to contact us. Ask a librarian contacts us directly at the law library of Congress. We need your name, email address and question. You can give us a call. We are not -- we are all available in the reading room. We are slowly opening up by appointment. You can always give us a call as well. If you have a question that is more. You do a search on any page of Congress.gov you will notice the site feedback button. Is there an issue of the congressional record missing that you cannot find the content material setting up a search, ask a law librarian, that will be really helpful for you now I will see if we have any questions. I am not go anywhere. Just reading.

 I can answer the first one about whether we will be adding more content going back to the first Congress. That is definitely something we are looking at. I do not know when that will be added but we are certainly looking at adding more content. Thank you for your question.

 This is Kathy. Sorry, we have a couple of other questions. Somebody came up against a wall searching for the minutes of an executive session for the House foreign affairs committee. IDs searchable? The date was 1973.

 I am looking. I will head the committee tab just to narrow it down. I am having a little problem with my Internet at the moment so I might turn it over to you, Robert, if you are there.

 Sure.

 Sorry about that.

 Okay. You are looking for, was it committee transcripts?

 It was. The executive session at the House foreign affairs committee. Let's look at the content

 The coverage date page is a great place to bookmark those things update on Congress.gov that gives you an idea when those things are updating.

 If this is something in the committee materials?

 This should be committee materials. Here is the coverage for that. That is something in the 70s. So these go back to 95 and 93. We are working on adding more content but that is what we have for now that might explain why it is not showing up okay. Have other questions?

 I am looking. We are close to the end of our time that I do not see any more questions. I do have a quick question for myself. I noticed that there are iPad and iPhone apps. What about for android? Really for the most part we have in relying

 on Congress.gov using responsive web design. You can see the congressional record that was designed a long time ago so this is the responsive web design for whether it is an iPhone or android.

 I have another question. How would you find active [Indiscernible]

 I would say the committees might be a good place.

 If there is a particular thing that you are looking for and you are not finding it here you can always contact us through ask a librarian.

 Okay. Thank you so much. This was very informative. Laura did mention that this is being recorded. This will be up by July 20. Thank you to everyone for joining us today.

 Thank you

 Be sure to fill out your survey. This webinar today was scheduled because of several

 requests from the public so thank you. Everybody have a great day. Thank you.

 [Event Concluded]