

Comparison of Legislative Resources on *GPO Access* and Selected Government and Non-Government Web Sites

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This is the second in a series of ongoing evaluations of the October 1999 findings that reviewed the congressional and other legislative branch information available through *GPO Access* and compared the data to other relevant Government and non-government Web sites. This included Web sites provided by other Government agencies and entities, such as THOMAS and committee Web sites; libraries, including public, academic, law, and private libraries; and private or commercial companies. The following factors were analyzed: (1) what resources are available; (2) the scope of those resources; and (3) the source of those resources.

To preserve continuity from the baseline report the same sites were re-evaluated to see what changes had occurred since October 1999. In-depth comparison and analyses were conducted on four Government Web sites (*GPO Access*, the Library of Congress' THOMAS, House.gov, and Senate.gov) and three commercial, fee-based Internet services (Congressional Universe, CQ.com, and Lexis-Nexis). The comparative analysis came up with these key findings:

- *GPO Access* covered 19 out of the 22 measured legislative resources, which is still more than any other governmental or commercial site.
- *GPO Access* continues to provide the most comprehensive free legislative resources compared to other government sites.
- The government and commercial Web sites in this study are playing catch up in comparison to *GPO Access*' broad range of legislative resources.
- THOMAS (a government site) added 4 new legislative resources: Congressional documents (1774-1873); the Congressional hearings (1997-present); Congressional Floor votes (1989-present); and the *House Journal* 1789-1837.
- No significant additions were made for the House.gov and Senate.gov Web sites since the baseline report.
- The Congressional Universe's Web site (a commercial fee-based Internet service) provides increased coverage for the following resources: the Committee prints now begin in 1993; the Congressional reports now begins in 1989; and the Congressional floor votes now begin in 1987.
- CQ.com's Web site (a commercial fee-based Internet service) added three new legislative resources: the Committee prints (1995-present); the Congressional documents (1995-present); and the full text of Public Laws (1995-present).
- Lexis-Nexis' Web site (a commercial fee-based Internet service) added the full text of Public Laws (1921-present).

The findings of this comparative analysis were based upon reviews of twenty-two legislative resources located on selected government and commercial Web sites in comparison to *GPO Access*. General trends and differences in the data from the baseline analysis in October 1999 were noted. More detailed information concerning the resources and scope of a particular service is provided on the attached tables and graphs.

The dates and statements about the resources available on a particular service within this report and its attachments are based primarily on publicly available information on selected Web sites. When evaluating the legislative resources of the Web sites in this study, one of the criterion used to measure the legislative data was that it had to be resident on the provider's server, and not linked to GPO Access or THOMAS. Some of the information is difficult to locate or is restricted to some extent at commercial fee-based subscription Web sites that limit the amount of information to non-subscribers.¹

Available Online Resources

Compared to the baseline report in October 1999, *GPO Access* still has the greatest number of online legislative resources when comparing Government and non-government Web sites included in this study². The tables below present a summary comparison of the number of resources on each service; in total, 22 different resources are compared. These include the following: Bills (full text); Bills (history); Committee markups; Committee prints; Committee schedules; Congressional documents; Congressional hearings; *Congressional Record*; Congressional Reports; *Congressional Record Index*; *Economic Indicators*; Floor votes; GAO Comptroller General decisions; GAO reports; *House Calendar*; *House Journal*; Member profiles; *Pictorial Directory*; Public Laws (full text); *Senate Calendar*; *Statutes at Large*; and the *U.S. Code*.

GPO Access compared to Government Web sites:

<i>GPO Access</i>	19
THOMAS	9
House.gov	4
Senate.gov	4

GPO Access compared to non-government Web sites:

<i>GPO Access</i>	19
Lexis-Nexis	16
Congressional Universe	13
CQ.com	12

¹ Every attempt was made to locate and verify the accuracy of information presented in this report. It should be noted that there is a possibility of omissions or misstatements when reviewing and reporting data on the commercial fee based Web sites because of the likelihood of limited access.

² A resource is defined as a category or type of information, such as congressional bills or public laws. Only resources that reside on a Web site's own servers in a "considerable" collection are counted for that Web site. This distinction is made in part to exclude from the count Web sites, such as those for congressional committees on House.gov and Senate.gov, that contain only a small number of documents that are specific to one topic and not the more comprehensive collection that other Web sites in the comparison offer.

GPO Access is the only one of the compared Web sites to offer the following resources: the *House Calendar*, the *House Journal*,³ and the *Congressional Pictorial Directory*.

Legislative resources that appear on one or more of the compared Web sites but are lacking on *GPO Access* are as follows: committee markups, committee schedules, and *Statutes at Large*.⁴

Scope of Resources

Scope in this report is defined in the range of years or sessions of Congress covered by a resource, as well as comprehensiveness of coverage. To maintain consistency from the baseline report in October 1999, all congressional session citations are translated into years, with the assumption that coverage for a session begins with the first year of the session, unless a note on the Web site indicates the contrary.

Comparison of Legislative Resources on GPO Access versus Government Web Sites

In comparison to the October 1999 data on the selected Government Web sites, THOMAS has added four more legislative resources that already were included on *GPO Access*. Two of those resources, Congressional documents and the *House Journal*, only reference a historical period of time in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Congressional documents for THOMAS are from 1774-1873. *GPO Access* in comparison, provides access to Congressional documents from 1995-present. THOMAS' *House Journal* only covers the period of 1789-1837, while *GPO Access* maintains a more current *House Journal* from 1991-1994.

The other two legislative resources that THOMAS has added are Congressional hearings and Floor votes. THOMAS now provides access to these resources for the same period as *GPO Access*, 1997-present. THOMAS' Floor votes data spans from 1989-present providing the public with an additional 10 years of data, in comparison to *GPO Access*, 1999–present.

House.gov and Senate.gov remained status quo with the same four legislative resources. The legislative resources that started last year in 1999 for House.gov (committee schedules, Member profiles) and Senate.gov (Committee schedules, member profiles and the Senate calendar) have been extended into 2000.

³ THOMAS now offers the House Journal as an archived document for 1789-1837.

⁴ There are currently plans at GPO to incorporate *Statutes at Large* into *GPO Access* in the future.

Comparison of Legislative Resources on GPO Access versus Non-Government Web Sites

In the past seven months, the Congressional Universe web site has increased its archived coverage under the Committee Prints (now starting in 1993 versus 1995); the Congressional reports (now starting in 1989 versus 1990); and the Floor votes (now starting in 1987 versus 1988). The one comprehensive legislative resource that Lexis-Nexis added was the GAO Comptroller General decisions that go back to 1921. The Lexis-Nexis' version is wider in scope based on the 74-year differential in dates than the *GPO Access* version that spans from 1995 to the present.

CQ.com increased its coverage of legislative resources by adding three resources going from 1995–present in the following: the Committee prints, Congressional documents, and the full text of the Public Laws. Only CQ.com's Committee prints that started in 1995 have one more year of coverage than *GPO Access*. The other two legislative resources, the Congressional documents and the Public Laws are equal in time frame to *GPO Access*. Viewing the table of Comparison of Legislative Resources on *GPO Access* and Selected Non-Government Web Sites, one finds that Congressional Universe and Lexis-Nexis are using their Web sites to provide fee-based legislative information that began a few years before the *GPO Access* resources were started, and is maintained to the present.

In summary, *GPO Access* is still the leader in regards to the legislative resource categories measured for both government and non-government sites based on overall coverage from the past five years. Out of the 22 measured legislative resources, *GPO Access* has information on 19 of the resources, more than any other Web site, commercial or government. THOMAS has added four new categories that were not available before at the selected government Web sites. Listings of THOMAS' four new legislative resources include the Congressional documents for the years 1774-1873; Congressional hearings 1997 to the present; Floor votes 1989 to the present; and the House Journal 1789–1837. CQ.com added three new legislative resources: the Committee prints, Congressional documents and the full text of Public laws all from the year 1995 to the present. Lexis-Nexis added one new legislative resource, GAO Comptroller General decisions, from 1921 to the present.

Sources of Resources

The final category of this comparative analysis seeks to answer the question of whether the legislative resources on a given Web site are produced and/or housed by the sponsoring organization or provided through links to another Web site, such as *GPO Access*. As explained earlier in this report, educational and library Web sites were excluded from in-depth analysis due to their heavy reliance on other Web sites for their basic content. While all of the Web sites included in this study contain a large base of their own legislative resources, several of them also provide links to other Web sites to augment their content. The following table presents a glimpse of the resources on each Web site that rely on links to *GPO Access*.

Web site	Resources that link to <i>GPO Access</i>
THOMAS	Bills (full text), <i>Congressional Record</i> , <i>Congressional Record Index</i> , congressional reports
House.gov	Congressional hearings and reports on committee Web pages
Senate.gov	Bills (full text), <i>Congressional Record</i> , and <i>Senate Calendar</i> ; committee prints and congressional hearings on committee Web pages
Congressional Universe	Information unavailable ⁵
CQ.com	Information unavailable ⁶
Lexis-Nexis	Information unavailable ⁷

GPO Access does not link to any other Web site for its content of the legislative resources compared in this report.

Conclusion

In comparison to other governmental and commercial sites, *GPO Access* continues to be the innovative leader and guardian of legislative resources while providing a high level of comprehensive information to aid the public's need for free legislative information. The attached graphs and tables show that the U.S. Government Printing Office provides a wide variety of legislative resource information for free to the public in comparison to other governmental and commercial sites. Since the baseline report of October 1999, the non-governmental sites added more resources that appeared to mirror *GPO Access*' legislative resources in dates and some have surpassed *GPO Access* in years. Evaluating the latest additions since October 1999, there seemed to be more emphasis on specific legislative resources covering a longer time span, like the GAO Comptroller General decisions that cover 1921 to the present for Lexis-Nexis compared to the *GPO Access* site that only goes back to 1995. THOMAS in the selected Government Web sites section chose to add the Congressional documents 1774-1873 and the *House Journal* 1789-1837 providing a historical perspective in regard to an older era, but did not have the contemporary emphasis that *GPO Access* provides.

GPO Access fulfills the Congressional mandate of Public Law 103-40 to provide official free public access to electronic Federal Government information using the latest information technology available to search, browse and maintain archival and current information at one's fingertips. These facts should be evident by the incremental growth patterns of the selected government and non-government web site in the past seven months to mimic *GPO Access*' success as depicted in the attached tables and graphs. The attached tables and graphs represent the data that was gathered for this report, and was used to make the observations and conclusions above. They include a list of the 22 legislative resources that were studied, and also include the scope of those resources on each of the seven compared Web sites.

^{5,6,7}Information about possible links to *GPO Access* from these commercial Web sites are unavailable to non-subscribers.