

# FEDERAL AND NORTH CAROLINA LEGISLATIVE HISTORY ON THE WEB

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## I. Current and Recent Federal Legislative History

### A. **THOMAS:** <http://thomas.loc.gov/> (*not* [www.thomas.loc.gov](http://www.thomas.loc.gov/))

THOMAS has the Congressional Record and full text of legislation available from 1989 (101st Congress) to the present. THOMAS also has summaries (not full text) of legislation available back to 1975 (94th Congress).

1. Excellent resource that compares very favorably with commercial sites.
2. Fairly comprehensive coverage.
3. Good interface and relatively easy to use.
4. Numerous ways to search and THOMAS has a leg up on most commercial sites because much of the information there is “browse-able” where with Westlaw, Lexis and some other commercial vendors you generally have to put in some hopeful search terms and cross your fingers that the search turned up all relevant documents.
5. Generally in THOMAS you must search by first choosing a Congress to search/browse.

### B. **GPO Access Legislative Page:** <http://www.access.gpo.gov/>

Choose “GPO Access” Link; then choose “Legislative” Link:

[http://www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/legislative.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/legislative.html)

1. *One stop shopping*  
Links to various documents (legislative calendars, bill histories, house & senate journals, reports, committee prints).
2. Document coverage ranges from 1983 for general bill histories to the present Congress. The most comprehensive coverage is generally for legislation from 1994 to present.
3. Has link to Calendar of the U.S. House of Representatives and History of Legislation (103<sup>rd</sup> Congress to the present [107<sup>th</sup>] Congress):  
<http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/cong003.html>.
4. Generally search capabilities are not as good or as varied as with THOMAS.

### C. **U.S. Senate web site:** <http://www.senate.gov/index.cfm>.

Choose “legislative activities”

This is not a very helpful site for legislative history but gives some useful information and links to current calendars/schedules & committees. This site links to Thomas for legislative history material.

**D. U.S. House of Representatives:** <http://www.house.gov/>

Choose “The Legislative Process” Link: <http://www.house.gov/house/Legproc.html> (*the “L” in Legproc must be capitalized or you will get an error message*)

For the most part this page just links to different sections of Thomas. There are three links that are not to Thomas (Committee Jurisdiction; Current House Floor Proceedings; Tying it All Together; and Roll Call Vote, but only one “Committee Jurisdiction” has information that cannot just as easily be found on Thomas:

## **II. Historical Federal Legislative History**

**Library of Congress, American Memory Collection. A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation:** <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lawhome.html>

Contains many of the legislative history documents from the inception of the U.S. Congress and up to 1873.

## **III. Federal Legislative History 1874-1972**

Material from this era is not yet consistently available in electronic form via any free, authoritative website.

## **IV. North Carolina courts use legislative history to determine legislative intent.**

See Tom Davis, “Legislative History in North Carolina: Three Dozen Cases of the Twentieth Century” *North Carolina Bar Journal* (Fall, 2001) pp. 20-25.

-available with supplement at:

<http://www.aoc.state.nc.us/www/copyright/library/leghrefs.htm>

## **V. Three guides to N.C. legislative history research appear on the web:**

UNC Kathrine R. Everett Law Library guide

[http://library.law.unc.edu/research/nc\\_legal\\_databases.html#lhg](http://library.law.unc.edu/research/nc_legal_databases.html#lhg)

updated in 1995; guide to resources at UNC-CH

N.C. Supreme Court Library guide

<http://www.aoc.state.nc.us/www/copyright/library/libleggh.html>

thorough guide to N.C. legislative history research

Wake Forest Professional Center Library

<http://www.law.wfu.edu/library/lawresch/guides/ncleghis.htm>

updated in 1998; guide to resources at Wake Forest

Coming Soon: A practical step-by-step guide from the Legislative Library, by

Cathy Martin, Legislative Librarian

Check at <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/LegLibrary/>

## **VI. Finding documents N.C. courts are most likely to accept**

**A. To review the process, see the General Assembly's "How an Idea Becomes a Law."**  
<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/html2001/LegInfo/LegInfo.html>

### **B. Pre-introduction Reports of Study Commissions**

1. Some recent ones are available on the Internet. Two ways to find them:
  - a. <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/>  
Look under "Legislative Info" and then "Legislative Publications."
  - b. <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/LegLibrary/>  
Go to "Legislative Library" and search "Study Reports" by topic or by year. Those available on the Internet have links (most are 2001 forward, though a few earlier ones are also linked.)
2. New minutes of the Study Commissions may added to the General Assembly's website in the future.  
Monitor: <http://www.ncga.state.unc.us/>

### **C. Bill Histories and Bill Versions**

1. From the 1997-98 session forward, final bill versions and bill histories are available through the General Assembly site, <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/>
2. Bill histories provide a quick indication of any amendments and where they were added.
3. The full text of all bill versions from the 1999-2000 session forward are available on the General Assembly website.
4. The website offers multiple ways to access the text of a bill.

### **D. Standing Committee Minutes and Attached Materials**

1. Only available in print in the Legislative Library in Raleigh, 1977 to present
2. May be added to the General Assembly website in the future  
Monitor: <http://www.ndga/state.nc.us/>

### **E. Session Laws**

On the General Assembly site: <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/>

### **F. Debate in the House or Senate**

Live broadcast debate can be heard through the General Assembly website using special free audio programs available for download.  
<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/>