

Investigating Congress

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LEGISLATION – www.congress.gov provides full text access to current bills in the U.S. House and Senate, the U.S. Code, Congressional Record, and more. [Www.GovTrack.us](http://www.govtrack.us) is a free legislative tracking tool using Library of Congress information and repackages it on a searchable site.

[Clerk of the House](http://clerk.house.gov) has roll call votes can be found here for the House:

<http://clerk.house.gov/legislative/legvotes.aspx> and here for the Senate:

https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/vote_menu_115_2.htm Votes from past Senates can be found here, and downloadable <https://www.senate.gov/legislative/votes.htm>

LOBBYING. Find lobbying reports at

www.senate.gov/legislative/Public_Disclosure/LDA_reports.htm. Search the Lobbying Database contains reports filed on amounts of money paid to lobbyists, the issues on which they lobbied, sometimes the agencies they lobbied and who hired them. Lobbyists also must report campaign contributions or donations made to charities on behalf of members of Congress.

House Clerk also has a site, and some prefer that <https://lobbyingdisclosure.house.gov/> DOJ's Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) web site can provide information on the names of lobbyists for foreign entities. www.fara.gov

The Center for Responsive Politics maintains the comprehensive go-to lobbyist database: <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/>. The pay rival includes FEE-based service CQ Moneyline, <http://www.politicalmoneyline.com/> and <http://www.legistorm.com/>

Washington Representatives, which also has a web site, www.lobbyists.info offers an up-to-date site of registered lobbyists. Lacks historical data. Paid site but offers free trials. Often includes more complete than SOPR because they fact-check Senate filings.

For a good daily summary of new filings, subscribe to Politico's Influence newsletter

<https://www.politico.com/politicoinfluence/>

CONTRACTING. The Project On Government Oversight (POGO) tracks misconduct on the top 100 contractors: www.contractormisconduct.org.

You can search for federal contracts awarded to a particular business: a great place to start when looking at contracts awarded to companies in your area, or work being performed there. You can also search all contracts at a new government site, <http://usaspending.gov>.

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS -- More and more agencies are putting documents released under FOIA on this website: <https://foiaonline.gov/foiaonline/action/public/home> All EPA records are being released online. Government Attic -- <http://governmentattic.org/> A project of a FOIA activist, government attic posts FOIA logs and hundreds of documents FOIA'd.

Biased interest groups: Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) (<http://citizensforethics.org/>) – is a liberal interest group that has an online, searchable compendium of documents acquired from government agencies

<http://www.scribd.com/citizensforethics> Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) has thousands of documents responsive to many Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests from GovernmentDogs.org on Scribd.com. Look up the congressional correspondence logs, which Sunlight Foundation started acquiring from federal agencies in 2008. Another liberal group is [American Bridge 21st Century](#) PAC, which focuses on Republican accountability and it often files FOIAs to get public records.

Judicial Watch is a conservative group that has documents FOIA'd and available in a searchable form.

<http://www.judicialwatch.org/document-archive/category/foia-request/>

SPENDING. Taxpayers for Common Sense, www.taxpayer.net, has a well-earned reputation for tracking spending.

TRADE PRESS AND NEWSLETTERS. Most industries have trade publications and newsletters covering them and the regulators that regulate them. More news orgs are duplicating these traditional publications with “verticals,” or “pro” subscription products. Some of these can be found on Nexis or Factiva sites.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS. Nearly every industry has a trade group or professional association, often based in Washington and state capitals, to represent the industry's interests. Find the group and get their publications. Most are online and sometimes do not require a sign-in.

LAWSUITS. These are key documents to find a company's disputes with creditors, employees, rivals, etc. Can be windows into a company. Find disgruntled ex-workers. Many local dockets are online, and of course federal lawsuits are on PACER. www.pacer.gov/ Westlaw purports to have the most comprehensive collection of U.S. court cases. Expensive, but free trials offered.

<https://legalsolutions.thomsonreuters.com/law-products/westlaw-legal-research/legal-cases>

Courthouse News <https://subscribers.courthousenews.com/> has a database that covers numerous state courts. Not all courts, and not all cases are indexed, but many useful courts and cases. Search template allows user to search for works in a case description summary.

COMPANIES. EDGAR <http://www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/companysearch.html> is the Securities and Exchange web site where mandatory disclosures by public companies are posted. Documents there include 10-Q and 10-K (quarterly and annual reports) DEF-14A (proxy statement, includes salaries) and S-1 (initial public offering). Various services help sort your SEC search, such as Intelligize <https://www.intelligize.com/>

Corporations file with state secretary of state offices and most are online. A global search for corporations also can be done at www.opencorporates.org A list of secretaries of state and state

securities administrators can be found here <http://www.nasaa.org/about-us/contact-us/contact-your-regulator/>

Fictitious business name filings -- Legally required in some states for anyone who does business under a name other than her own. Usually filed with county clerk. Lists business's official name, kind of corporation, address and responsible person -- often the owner.

Business licenses -- filed with city or, in unincorporated areas, the county. Basis for city business taxes.

State licenses -- Required for certain regulated business (real estate agents, etc.)

COMPANY OFFICIALS. The company's public affairs officers and public officials. Outside public affairs officials who represent the company. Use discretion depending on the angle of the story. Get company official names from web sites and from SEC (see below). Also, Leadership Directories, publisher of government "Yellow Books," public executive listings. The web site is <http://ldi.bvdep.com> and lists the executives at every company. It's expensive but worth it if you can afford it.

FORMER EMPLOYEES AND RIVALS. Employees who have sued the company, though they have an ax to grind, can often provide inside information. Check lawsuits, get internal directories, get names off web sites and Google searches.

LABOR UNIONS. Often know more about a company than the company officials, where the bodies are buried. But they also sometimes have an interest to keep the secrets secret. Union officials can put you in touch with employees.

REGULATORS. Rule-making, fines, citations, policy agendas -- often everything important runs through the federal, state and local agencies that regulate industries. Check rule dockets, warning letters, enforcement actions, file public-record requests for meetings with officials at dozens of agencies, including EPA, USDA, Commerce, DOD, Education, HHS, Homeland Security, HUD, DOJ, Labor, State, Interior and Treasury. Dockets are found at the rulemaking "gateway." <https://www.regulations.gov> The eRulemaking Program was created in 2002 as an E-Government project and is managed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES. Find out which legislative and [congressional committees](#) have jurisdiction over the industry. Look at legislation, appropriation bills, hearing reports, investigative reports. FOIA lawmaker correspondence with regulatory agencies. But call the FOIA office or check online first because some agencies post the logs online. Here's the Department of Homeland Security: <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/congressional-correspondence-logs>

NON-PROFITS. Many lawmakers have close affiliations with nonprofits. The 990 tax forms for tax-exempt, nonprofit organizations are available in a variety of places, including Propublica's search engine. The data for nonprofit tax returns going back as far as 2001.

<https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/> An excellent word-searchable database is [citizenaudit.org](#). It is a subscription service, as is Guidestar. Guidestar's pay regime is quickly taking a backseat to state regulators who are more and more putting up records, including the widely used California AG's Registry of Charitable Trusts site at

<http://caag.state.ca.us/charities/>. It is still good at some of the harder-to-find stuff. The Foundation Center www.fdncenter.org has tax returns and financial info on charities/trusts. Click on Foundation Finder, <http://foundationcenter.org/find-funding/990-finder>, which has details and tax returns on 70,000 private and community foundations, or to the 990 search engine.

Economic Research Institute for nonprofit searching; has nonprofit executive pay searching: <http://www.eri-nonprofit-salaries.com/index.cfm?FuseAction=NPO.Search>

LAW FIRMS AND LAWYERS. For a nationwide search, try Martindale-Hubbell at www.martindale.com. Lawyers pay to be listed in Martindale. Major law firms post extensive bios on their web pages.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS. Track federal campaign contributions by individual, company or industry at www.opensecrets.org, the Web site of the Center for Responsive Politics. CRP codes donations to make them more accessible than they are on the Federal Election Commission site, www.fec.gov. Another site, <http://moneyline.cq.com> requires paid registration. Selected state information at The Institute on Money in State Politics <http://www.followthemoney.org/> The Campaign Finance Institute provides statistics and historical campaign finance information. <http://www.cfinst.org/>

FUND RAISERS—Political Party Time <http://politicalpartytime.org> is a crowd-sourced project to track parties for members of Congress or congressional candidates that happen all year round in Washington, D.C. and beyond. Sources send invitations involving members of Congress to Party Time, but since this is all voluntary, the information contained in this database is by no means complete. Searchable by member, committee, etc. [Politwoops](#), which tracks deleted tweets from politicians, is at ProPublica. The [Congress API](#) is operated by ProPublica. [House Expenditure Reports](#) are published by ProPublica

Another service tracking parties, including political fundraisers, is <http://guestofaguest.com/> which was founded by Cameron Winklevoss, one of the brothers who famously sued Mark Zuckerberg over Facebook. Guestofaguest is a database of parties with calendar and photos designed for the social scene.

DARK MONEY--Dark money is political spending designed to influence an election and the source of the money is not disclosed. The most common organizations shielding their sources of money are 501(c) organizations. These groups can engage in varying amounts of political activity and because they are not technically political organizations, they are not required to disclose their donors to the public. These groups under the law cannot coordinate with political parties or candidates and therefore are allowed to raise unlimited sums of money from individuals, organizations and corporations. Opensecrets has a search page for nonprofit political groups <http://www.opensecrets.org/dark-money/explore-our-reports.php>

527 Groups - IRS Data. The IRS has made the disclosures filed by section 527 organizations—the independent political committees that can raise money in unlimited amounts from any source—searchable, albeit with a cranky, complicated, squint-inducing interface. You get raw data from the search, but right now it's the best thing going on 527s. The data is available here:

<http://forms.irs.gov/politicalOrgsSearch/search/gotoBasicSearch.action>

<http://forms.irs.gov/politicalOrgsSearch/search/gotoAdvanced8871Search.action>

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES, STAFFER SALARIES. The Center for Responsive Politics has a link on site to estimate members personal wealth. Trump administration financial disclosures. <https://www.opensecrets.org/trump/financial-disclosures> Also, the very useful Web site, <http://www.legistorm.com/> has information on congressional trips, the raw financial

disclosure forms and congressional staffer salaries. Legistorm pretty much took over where others left off, such as the Center for Public Integrity which had Medill's database of trips from 2005 and updated it a few years ago (but not lately)

TRIPS. Reports of certain expenditures for all official foreign travel by Members and staff of the U.S. House of Representatives are filed publicly under law. Reports from 1994 through the current quarter are printed in the Congressional Record and can be searched here:

http://clerk.house.gov/public_disc/foreign/index.aspx Lawmakers trips found on CQ PoliticalMoneyLine, <http://moneyline.cq.com> also has analyzed privately funded travel from 2000 to 2006 as disclosed by members and senators.

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