

# TOPS IN THOMAS

## THROUGH THE AUGUST RECESS OF THE 112TH CONGRESS

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**T**HOMAS was launched seventeen years ago in January of 1995 at the start of the 104th Congress. The Library of Congress was directed as part of a bipartisan effort to make federal legislative information freely available to the public.<sup>1</sup> THOMAS has become a popular government source of legislative information.

Bill text is searchable from the 101st (1989) through the current Congress. The Bill Summary & Status information covers the 93rd (1973) through the current Congress and includes sponsor(s); co-sponsor(s); official, short and popular titles; floor/executive actions; detailed legislative history; Congressional Record page references; bill summary; committees of referral; reporting and origin; subcommittees of referral; amendment descriptions; and subjects.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> Legislative Information Systems Manager for the Law Library of Congress. This article is a modified version of the original publication from *In Custodia Legis* at [blogs.loc.gov/law/2011/08/tops-in-thomas-at-the-august-recess-of-the-112th-congress/](http://blogs.loc.gov/law/2011/08/tops-in-thomas-at-the-august-recess-of-the-112th-congress/). If you like learning what people are searching, subscribe to the THOMAS: Top Ten Legislative Items feed by RSS, email, or follow @THOMASdotgov on Twitter. It can be rather fascinating to review the Top Ten and come across a bill from a previous Congress and analyze why it is there to understand the possibly anomaly.

<sup>1</sup> See the original THOMAS press release, The Speaker of the House and the Librarian of Congress Announce Online Public Access to Congressional Information, [www.loc.gov/today/pr/1995/95-002.html](http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/1995/95-002.html) (vis. Nov. 28, 2011) and a screenshot of the first homepage, [blogs.loc.gov/law/2011/11/the-thomas-starting-point-pic-of-the-week/](http://blogs.loc.gov/law/2011/11/the-thomas-starting-point-pic-of-the-week/) (vis. Nov. 28, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> While a simple search of the Bill Summary & Status data is available from the

THOMAS also includes the ability to search multiple Congresses, Public Laws by number, access to House and Senate roll call votes, the ability to search the Congressional Record from the 101st (1989), search Committee Reports from the 104th (1995), search Presidential Nominations from the 100th (1987), and search treaty information from the 90th (1967).

The frequency with which legislation is searched for on THOMAS gives one indication about the interest in particular legislation. To determine the THOMAS Top Ten, each week a member of the THOMAS team receives a spreadsheet with our metric data from the previous week. The data is from the previous seven days based on the legislative items searched in the database. Then a member of the team applies a macro to the data that populates the top ten list, and the list is verified for accuracy. The new data page is created by another member of the THOMAS team and then published on THOMAS.

Every Top Ten has a date based URL that can be used to view previous lists. The lists URLs are constructed with the year, month, and date at the end (for example, [thomas.loc.gov/home/topten/topten\\_20111127.html](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/topten/topten_20111127.html)). This can be used if you want to compare legislation over time or follow how a highly searched for piece of legislation trended.

The August 2011 recess was the perfect time to provide an update on the legislative items that had been the most popular since the 112th Congress began in January of 2011. Back in April, only a few months into the 112th Congress, I reported that of the top twenty at that time, only eight were from the 112th Congress, several related to health care, and most became public laws.<sup>3</sup>

As of this writing, a few months later, twelve of the top twenty are from the current 112th Congress, crowding out a few items from the previous 111th Congress.

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homepage of THOMAS.gov, the advanced search is available at [thomas.loc.gov/home/LegislativeData.php](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/LegislativeData.php).

<sup>3</sup> See [blogs.loc.gov/law/2011/04/tops-in-thomas-for-the-first-three-months-of-the-112th-congress/](http://blogs.loc.gov/law/2011/04/tops-in-thomas-for-the-first-three-months-of-the-112th-congress/) (vis. Oct. 30, 2011).

1. H.R. 1 [112th]: Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011 – *Latest Major Action*: Passed House, returned to the Senate Calendar.
2. H.R. 1473 [112th]: Department of Defense and Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011 – *Latest Major Action*: Became Public Law No: 112-10.
3. H.R. 3590 [111th]: Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act – *Latest Major Action*: Became Public Law No: 111-148.
4. H.R. 1363 [112th]: Further Additional Continuing Appropriations Amendments, 2011 – *Latest Major Action*: Became Public Law No: 112-8.
5. H.R. 4173 [111th]: Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act – *Latest Major Action*: Became Public Law No: 111-203.
6. S. 627 [112th]: Budget Control Act of 2011 – *Latest Major Action*: Passed House.
7. H.R. 3 [112th]: No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act – *Latest Major Action*: Read the second time. Placed on Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders. Calendar No. 40.
8. H.R. 1540 [112th]: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 – *Latest Major Action*: Passed House, read twice in Senate, and referred to the Committee on Armed Services.
9. H.R. 2 [112th]: Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act – *Latest Major Action*: Passed House, read twice in the Senate.
10. H.R. 3082 [111th]: Continuing Appropriations and Surface Transportation Extensions Act, 2011 – *Latest Major Action*: Became Public Law No: 111-322.
11. H.R. 3200 [111th]: America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009 – *Latest Major Action*: 10/14/2009 Placed on the Union Calendar, Calendar No. 168 (note: H.R. 3590 became the primary health care bill during the 111th Congress, and this bill died when the 111th Congress ended).

12. H.R. 2560 [112th]: Cut, Cap, and Balance Act of 2011—*Latest Major Action*: Passed House, Motion to table the motion to proceed to the bill agreed to in Senate by Yea-Nay Vote. 51 - 46.
13. H.R. 4853 [111th]: Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010 — *Latest Major Action*: Became Public Law No: 111-312.
14. S. 223 [112th]: FAA Air Transportation Modernization and Safety Improvement Act — *Latest Major Action*: Passed Senate with amendments by Yea-Nay Vote. 87 - 8.
15. H.R. 4646 [111th]: Debt Free America Act — *Latest Major Action*: 2/23/2010 Referred to House Committee on Ways and Means, in addition to the Committees on the Budget, Rules, and Appropriations.
16. H.R. 1380 [112th]: New Alternative Transportation to Give Americans Solutions Act of 2011 — *Latest Major Action*: 4/6/2011 Referred to House Subcommittee on Energy and Power.
17. H.R. 4 [112th]: Comprehensive 1099 Taxpayer Protection and Repayment of Exchange Subsidy Overpayments Act of 2011 — *Latest Major Action*: Became Public Law No: 112-9.
18. H.R. 4872 [111th]: Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 — *Latest Major Action*: Became Public Law No: 111-152.
19. H.R. 25 [112th]: Fair Tax Act of 2011 — *Latest Major Action*: 1/5/2011 Referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.
20. H.R. 1 [111th]: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 — *Latest Major Action*: Became Public Law No: 111-5.

There were eight items that were in the top twenty in April of 2011 that dropped out: H.R. 514 [112th]: FISA Sunsets Extension Act of 2011; H.R. 6523 [111th]: Ike Skelton National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011; S. 1435 [111th]: Human-

Animal Hybrid Prohibition Act of 2009; H.R. 2751 [111th]: FDA Food Safety Modernization Act; H.R. 3081 [111th]: Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011; H.R. 662 [112th]: Surface Transportation Extension Act of 2011; H.R. 3962 [111th]: Preservation of Access to Care for Medicare Beneficiaries and Pension Relief Act of 2010; and H.R. 658 [112th]: FAA Air Transportation Modernization and Safety Improvement Act.

Reviewing what tops THOMAS over time can be fascinating and can provide insight into what the national constituency deems most important on Capitol Hill. There are frequently bills that top the list that you would expect, given the amount of press they generate and receive in the conversations of the day. The Health Care Bill, H.R. 3590 [111th], was one of the most controversial and decisive bills in recent memory so it makes sense to see it as the third most viewed piece of legislation on THOMAS, even after its passage. It also follows that the Stimulus Package, H.R. 1 [111th], is still on the list as it has been a very high profile bill that became a symbol in the debate over how to bolster and recuperate the economy. Sometimes an anomaly creeps in and with a little research you can determine that a bill was mentioned a high traffic internet website, blog, or twitter account.<sup>4</sup> From the public's general interest to a specific industry's interest in legislation, the tops in THOMAS provides an interesting measure of interest.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the Debt Free American Act, in THOMAS at [hdl.loc.gov/loc.uscongress/legislation.111hr4646](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.uscongress/legislation.111hr4646) appeared on Snopes at [www.snopes.com/politics/taxes/debtfree.asp](http://www.snopes.com/politics/taxes/debtfree.asp). Note that in this case, Debt Free America Act, H.R. 4646 [111th], died in committee in the previous Congress, yet has been searched for more than the Stimulus Package.