

*San Francisco Daily Journal, 5/25/07  
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## **Finding Congressional Research Reports**

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### **What Is the Congressional Research Service?**

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) is where members of Congress, Congressional committees, and staff can go for nonpartisan, in-depth public policy research. CRS is a part of the Library of Congress, and was originally created in 1914. The staff at CRS are experts in their fields, including law, foreign affairs, public administration, economics, and the information, social, political sciences, and natural sciences. CRS staff are often asked to give expert testimony at Congressional hearings. CRS is best known for its written reports, which are notable for their concise summations, expertise, depth, breadth, and objectivity.

### **Why Would I Want To Read One?**

If you are thinking that your practice area is dominated by local law, and that CRS reports might not be of interest to you, you may be surprised at the areas of study that CRS reports cover.

If you have a family law practice, then the analysis of the federal Defense of Marriage Act might be of interest to you:

- *Same-Sex Marriages: Legal Issues:* "Massachusetts became the first state to legalize marriage between same-sex couples on May 17, 2004, as a result of a November 2003 decision by the state's highest court that denying gay and lesbian couples the right to marry violated the state's constitution. Currently, federal law does not recognize same-sex marriages. This report discusses the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), P.L. 104-199, which prohibits federal recognition of same-sex marriages and allows individual states to refuse to recognize such marriages performed in other states, and discusses the potential legal challenges to DOMA. Moreover, this report summarizes the legal principles applied in determining the validity of a marriage contracted in another state, surveys the various approaches employed by states to prevent same-sex marriage, and examines House and Senate resolutions introduced in previous Congresses proposing a constitutional amendment and limiting federal courts' jurisdiction to hear or determine any question pertaining to the interpretation of the DOMA." (1/19/2007)

If you have an employment discrimination practice, you might be interested in proposed federal legislation on genetic discrimination:

- *Genetic Discrimination: Overview of the Issue and Proposed Legislation:* "This report provides an overview of the scope and current permissible uses of health information and genetic information. It reviews the existing evidence of genetic discrimination and the impact of the fear of discrimination. Then it provides a more detailed

discussion of S. 358/H.R. 493 and the key issues raised by the genetic nondiscrimination bills." (3/7/2007)

Potential changes in the basic tax structure of home-ownership should be of interest to the real-estate practitioner :

- *Fundamental Tax Reform: Options for the Mortgage Interest Deduction*: "This report describes the deduction for home mortgage interest, provides an economic analysis of the deduction, and concludes with an analysis of the possible changes to the mortgage interest deduction in the context of tax reform and the potential impacts of those changes." (3/12/2007)

If you have a criminal law practice, then this report on hate crimes might be useful:

- *Hate Crimes: Legal Issues*: "After several Congresses which failed to see the enactment of a federal hate crime statute, the 110th Congress may provide the framework for enactment of a federal hate crime law." (4/24/2007)

### **How Can I Get a Copy?**

Historically, these reports were not released to the public unless a member of Congress asked for a copy for a constituent. Those copies have been making their way on to the Internet. You can subscribe to a service that will provide copies of all the reports, for a fee, as Hastings Law Library does. Also historically, some direct requests to CRS for copies have been honored, when public dissemination "enhances CRS service to Congress." There has been some legislative effort to allow direct dissemination to the public in nearly every recent session of Congress, so far with no result. In a move away from public access, the CRS director recently clamped down on dissemination of CRS reports, calling for high-level staff review before any CRS reports are given to non-Congressional staff. Nevertheless, CRS reports are still making their way onto the Internet.

An excellent guide to *CRS Reports* is available at <http://www.llrx.com/features/crsreports.htm>. This guide provides an historical introduction to *CRS Reports* (over 1,000 written reports are published yearly), and links to the various online sources for the reports. In addition, these sites have collections of CRS Reports:

- The Thurgood Marshall Law Library maintains an online collection of *CRS Reports* on homeland security, terrorism, and health law, at <http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/index.asp>.
- [OpenCRS](#) is a clearinghouse for CRS reports, created by the Center for Democracy and Technology. The site allows searching by keyword, or it can be searched by "Current Issues." The site has a link where visitors can request a CRS report from their member of Congress. Anyone can add a report to the site's library.
- The Law Librarians' Society of Washington D.C. (<http://www.llsdc.org/sourcebook/CRS-Congress.htm>) lists and links to most CRS reports online.
- The National Council for Science and The Environment has CRS Reports at <http://www.cnie.org/nle/crs>.
- Counting California, from the California Digital Library, has an alphabetical list of links to CRS Reports at <http://countingcalifornia.cdlib.org/CRS/alpha.html>.

- The First Amendment Center has CRS Reports at [http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/about.aspx?item=crs\\_reports#](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/about.aspx?item=crs_reports#).
- The National Agricultural Law Center has CRS Reports at <http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/crs>.
- The Federation of American Scientists collects CRS Reports at <http://www.opencrs.com/collection/fas>.

If you can't find your report, and you know the title, you might try using a phrase search on [Google](#). For example, try "The USA Patriot Act: a Sketch" as your search. If the report is on the Internet, you should get a link to a copy of the report in the first few results. Or, you can try the new Google application at <http://2act.org/p/576.html>, which will find most (not all) online CRS reports.

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