



GovTrack.us **2019 Backer Update**

A project of Civic Impulse, LLC
July 15, 2019



A Letter to our Supporters

Fifteen years ago GovTrack launched to make Congressional data more accessible. Today, millions of Americans across the country are using our tools to track Congress. While there is no greater reward than knowing our work has helped others, we're proud to highlight some of our successes this past year.

Since our last update we have been invited to Capitol Hill twice, and have been cited in 35 articles across 24 reporting outlets including the Associated Press, Politifact, and The Washington Post. We have published over 180 of our own GovTrack Insider articles summarizing legislative activity and trends in congressional activity, and have added new context-building features to GovTrack to tell a more complete story of Congress.

For our third backer update, on our fifteen year anniversary, we once again extend a tremendous thank you to the supporters and readers who make this work possible.

Keep tracking Congress!
The GovTrack Team

GovTrack in 2019

On Capitol Hill

GovTrack founder Joshua Tauberer testified before a Congressional committee twice since our last update. In May, he was [invited to testify](#) before the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. Following his testimony, the committee made [recommendations to Congress](#) including publishing committee votes in a data format that we could use to show, track, and analyze them on GovTrack. You can watch and read his [full testimony here](#).



Joshua speaks to the House Select Committee

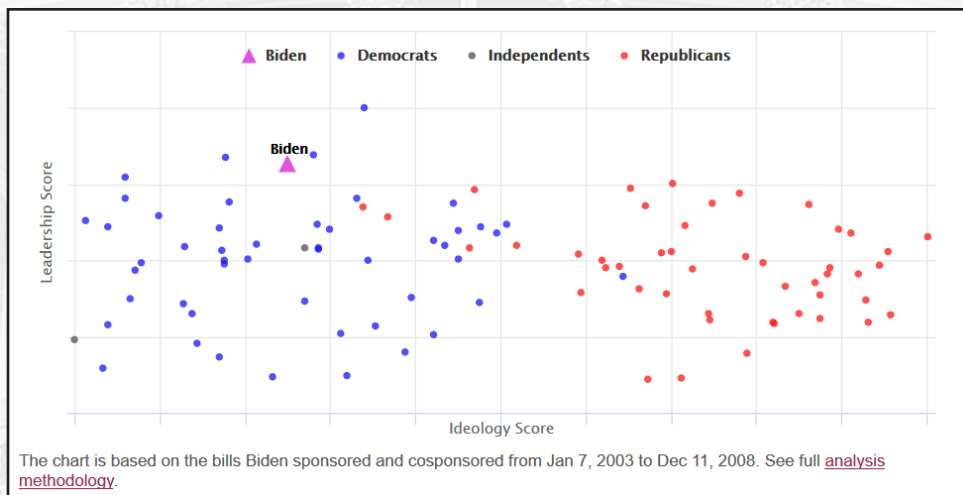
Joshua also testified to the House Appropriations' Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch, with jurisdiction over the House's own budget, on the importance of funding public access to legislative information. He thanked them for the work they have done so far and made recommendations to improve the tools available for users like you. You can watch and read [Josh's testimony on GovTrack Insider](#).

Last month, our associate Ben Hammer presented GovTrack tools to a roomful of Congressional staff at the Congressional Transparency Caucus, alongside nine other transparency organizations. We would like to thank the office of Rep. Mike Quigley for hosting, and Demand Progress for organizing. You can watch [Ben's presentation here](#).

In the Media

It's not just Congress recognizing our work. GovTrack's data and reporting has been used by [24 different media outlets](#) over the last year, helping professional journalists and analysts convey Congressional activity.

Some of our recent favorites include a fact check of 2020 candidate Joe Biden's lie that he was "[labeled as one of the most liberal members of the United States Congress](#)," evidence that Democrats have been able to [continue their legislative duties while investigating the executive branch](#), and recognition of [the importance of a Congressional Chief Data Officer](#).



We ranked Biden as a middle-of-the-pack liberal during his time as a Senator

Media coverage demonstrates a key success of GovTrack's efforts --- an ecosystem of Congressional data. Data transparency isn't just about making information available; it's about making it accessible. That means contextualizing the data to build a story. When journalists use our work to write their articles, they're doing us a good turn too: making our data more digestible for everyday Americans. We do some of this on our own too, on GovTrack Insider.

GovTrack Insider

Sometimes data speaks for itself, but mostly it doesn't. Over the past year we've written over 180 articles on complex legislation, trends in Congressional activity, and topical stories relating to Congress. Here are a few of our favorites:

2020 Democratic Primary

Thirteen of the 2020 Democratic Presidential candidates are current or recent Members of Congress, meaning there's no shortage of data about them on GovTrack. In fact, there's so much data that we've written four articles outlining how each candidate has behaved in Congress issue by issue. You can view [our first article here](#), and also our articles on [health and criminal justice](#), [oversight and immigration](#), and [finance and the economy](#).

Mapmaker: The Gerrymandering Board Game

If you've been reading [recent Supreme Court verdicts](#), you may be wanting to learn more about gerrymandering. Learn by doing with Mapmaker: The Gerrymandering Board Game, which has players compete to rig elections with their own convoluted district lines.



GovTrack's Jesse Rifkin wrote about [our staff's experience playing Mapmaker, and three siblings' experiences making it](#).

Almost Unanimous

We published our [third edition of Almost Unanimous](#), where we examine why lone dissenters voted no on otherwise unanimous bills. This year featured twelve Members of Congress, including Sens. Bernie Sanders and Ted Cruz, and Rep. Justin Amash.

New Congressional Data

Of course, what everyone is most excited for is what new data is available! Beyond our [2018 Report Cards for the 115th Congress](#), we've added several new context-building features to GovTrack to help users like you track Congress:

Press Releases on Bills

Thanks to [ProPublica's Congress API](#), you can now find press releases from Members of Congress in the "position statements" section of bill pages. Press releases are weighted to display statements the primary sponsor, the most influential cosponsor, and a Member who is ideologically distant from the primary sponsor.

Press releases are an important part of understanding what a bill would do. By looking at what Members of Congress say in support or opposition of a bill, you can get a sense of the expected impacts of the bill and use that information to decide your own stance.

Position statements


What legislators are saying


["Maloney Announces Broad Coalition of Support for Groundbreaking Anti-Money Laundering Legislation"](#)

— Rep. Carolyn Maloney [D-NY12] (Sponsor) on May 7, 2019

[More statements at ProPublica Represent...](#)

What stakeholders are saying

 **American Bar Association:** Here are links to letters of opposition from other organizations across the ideological spectrum, all of which oppose the passage of H.R. 2513, including the ACLU, NACDL, Due Process Institute, FreedomWorks, the NFIB, and twenty-two other small business groups.

 **Financial Accountability and Corporate Transparency Act ...:** We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our strong support for your bipartisan Corporate Transparency Act of 2019 (H.R. 2513), which would require companies to disclose information about the real people who own or control them (often called the "beneficial owners") ...

The position statement section of the [Corporate Transparency Act of 2019](#)

Oversight and Investigations

Since Democrats reclaimed the House, Congressional Oversight has become a national issue, particularly in regards to the Trump Administration. GovTrack's Amy West wrote [a guide to key oversight activities by House Committees](#).

	Oversight	Judiciary	Financial Services	Ways and Means	Armed Services	Energy & Commerce	Homeland Security	Education & Labor	Foreign Affairs	Intelligence	Natural Resources	Science	Transportation	Veterans' Affairs	Agriculture	Small Business
Hearings	T	T	✓	✓	T	T	T	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Document Requests	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T		
Subpoenas	T	T	T													
Court Cases	T	T	T	T												
Contempt Votes	T	T														

Oversight on the Trump Administration in bright orange; oversight on issues not unique to this administration are in pastel orange.

Oversight is one of Congress' key functions and a check-and-balance implicit in the Constitution is to supervise the activities of the executive branch. Sometimes it is as simple as an annual check-in during appropriations hearings, other times oversight includes subpoenas and investigations. We have been covering them on our [Oversight and Investigations page](#).

Population Representation in Senate Votes

The current Republican majority of [53 Senators represents only 48% of the population](#), and in the 115th Congress the 54 Senators who voted to confirm Justice Neil Gorsuch accounted for just 46% of all Americans. Never in modern history have as many Senate votes been decided by senators representing such a small part of the nation as in the last two and a half years.

To better track representation in the Senate, GovTrack now displays population representation for all Senate votes beneath the totals.

Totals		All Votes	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Yea	54%	54	53	1	0
Nay	44%	44	0	42	2
Not Voting	2%	2	0	2	0

Nomination Confirmed. Simple Majority Required. Source: [senate.gov](#).
 The Yea votes represented 48% of the country's population by apportioning each state's population to its voting senators.

In [this vote for confirming a federal judge](#), 54 Senators represent 48% of Americans

Odds and ends

Congressional Misconduct Database

The Congressional Misconduct Database is still being updated, now including 397 instances of misconduct and alleged misconduct. Our most recent update was on June 28, when the House Committee on Ethics established an investigative subcommittee in response to non-compliance from Representative Matt Gaetz. Gaetz has been accused of witness intimidation, and has refused to respond to House Ethics' requests for an interview.

You can read more about this and many other instances of misconduct in [our database here](#).

Readable Redesign

It's the little things that make a big difference. In data, creating an easy-to-use interface is crucial for accessibility. That's why we occasionally tweak the look of GovTrack. By making small adjustments to the fonts, colors, and layout of certain GovTrack pages, we hope to have made your experience tracking Congress that much easier.

New "Write/Call Congress" button

One part of our redesign isn't about accessibility --- it's about action. Every bill page now has a green button at the top of the page reading "Write/Call Congress" to guide you through contacting your Members about legislation.

When you use the button you'll be prompted to give your address. With that, we can let you know who your representatives are, how to contact them, and what to say. We also include a few tips on how to best relay your message.