Texas Law database

Team: For-git about it

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# Introduction

## Problem

The democratic process works best if there is a well-informed citizenry. Given more information, voters can make more informed decisions on their support for political candidates. However, there currently does not exist a well-made central database containing information concerning the Texas Senate. There is no place to see comprehensive information on bills, senators, committees and the relationship between them. Without such a database, it is difficult for citizens to hold their government accountable. The ability for voters to see a candidate’s voting record allows them to decide for themselves whether a candidate is suitable for the job. While such databases exist for the federal government (<https://www.govtrack.us/> is an example), the only place where one can access a database for bills going through the Texas legislature is through the official Texas legislature website, which is lacking in information. The Texas Law Database exists to provide such a service, to open source democracy in Texas, and to serve as a source of information so that voters can learn about bills, legislators, and committees in order to stay informed about the democratic process in Texas.

## Use Cases

The Texas Law Database contains the following things:

Information about specific bills that are going through, or have gone through, the Texas Senate, including a brief summary, author, status, a link to the full text of the bill, the committee that the bill went through, and a breakdown of the votes for the bill.

Information about individual senators, including a brief biography, their voting history, a list of committees they chair or are a member of, and a link to their facebook and/or twitter, if they have one.

Information about Senate committees, including a description, their members, and a list of all bills to have gone through that committee.

Users of the Texas Law Database can learn about the most recent bills to go through committee or a floor vote, or they can look through the lists of senators and committees and see information about the bills they have voted on.

Users can use the Texas Law Database to see Senator’s voting records over time, and thus get a better understanding of a senator’s position on issues. Voters can then use this information to affect their voting decision.

Users can see a list of bills that passed or failed and gain a greater understanding of the legal trends for the Senate as a whole. Users in the political field can use this information to make informed predictions on proposed bills or bills to be proposed.

The net effect of this information is to allow voters in Texas to contribute to and to learn about the Texas senate, to inject some much needed openness in the democratic process, and to give voters and citizens in Texas the tools to make informed decisions about their Senate.

# Design

## Design Overview

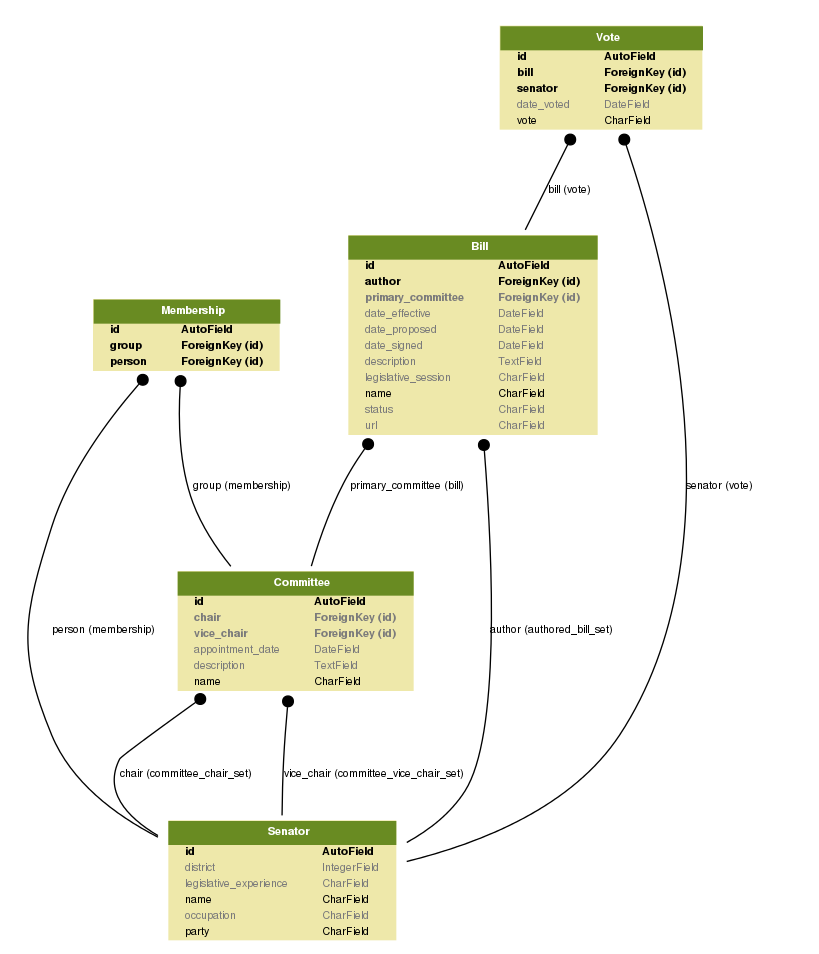
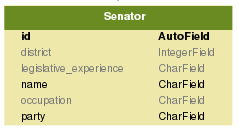


Figure 1: UML Overview of Models

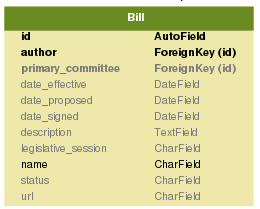
## Django Models

### Senator Model



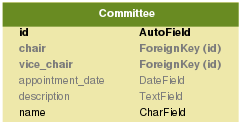
The senator model models each of the 31 individual senators in the Texas Senate. These are the legislators in the Texas Senate who author, sponsor, and vote on bills, whether in committees or on the floor. The primary key is an auto-generated integer ID supplied by Django. Attributes include their name, district, party, occupation, legislative experience, and their facebook and twitter pages if they have one.

### Bill Model



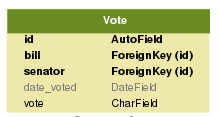
The bill model models specific bills submitted to committees or the senate floor at large. These bills are bills that have gone to a vote in committees or on the floor. As with senators, their primary key is an auto-generated integer supplied by Django. Attributes include the name of the bill, the legislative session in which the bill was proposed, the date it was proposed, and if passed, the date it was signed into law and the date it was effective. Attributes also include its status, a link to its full text, and a brief description on the contents of the bill.

### Committee Model



The committee model models the 31 standing committees in the Texas Senate. Every bill must go through committee, where it is debated, amended, and voted on before it goes to the floor where it is voted on by the Senate as a whole. As with senators and bills, the primary key is an auto-generated integer supplied by Django. Attributes include its name, a description, and the date that the committee was first formed.

### Vote Model



The vote model models the votes that senators cast for bills. Senators may vote Aye or Nay, or they may be present but not voting, or absent from the vote. We store the actual value of the vote itself as a tuple of strings, a 3 letter abbreviation for the value of the vote, and its full English value.

### Senator and Bill Relationship

Bills are authored by Senators, and although there are co-authors, we have chosen to only include the main author, for simplicity’s sake. A bill can have a long list of co-authors, some of which may not be senators, and thus, as an initial step, we have decided only to include main authors. Senators can author multiple bills. Therefore, we have a many to one relationship between bills and senators.

### Senator and Committee Relationship

There are 31 standing committees in the Texas Senate. Each committee is chaired by a senator and vice chaired by a senator, though those positions may be vacant at any given time. Each committee also has some number of senators as members, usually less than 10. A senator may be part of any number of committees. Therefore, there exists a many to many relationship between senators and committees. Since there are multiple types of relationship between senators and committees: members, vice chairs, and chairs, a senator’s membership of a committee is modeled through the membership intermediate class.

### Bill and Committee Relationship

Each bill must go through a committee. While a bill may go through multiple committees before going to the floor for a vote, and indeed, every bill must go through the calendar committee to be placed on the floor for a vote, each bill mainly falls under the purview of one committee. This is the committee which we have chosen to model. Each committee oversees many bills. Therefore, there exists a many to one relationship between bills and committees.

## RESTful API

### JSON

Our API is a RESTful API that performs transactions using JSON, a lightweight standard format that uses human readable text to transmit data objects consisting of attribute-value pairs. Although originally derived from JavaScript, its simplicity and power make it an extremely widespread web standard. We separated our HTML returns and our JSON returns by prepending /api. Example: API endpoint for ‘/people’ would be ‘/api/people/’ .

### GET

#### /get/senators

Gets all of the senators. Example:

+ Response 200 (application/json)

[

{

"id": 1,

"name": "Jane Nelson",

"party": "Republican",

"occupation": "Businesswoman, former teacher",

"legistlative\_experience": "Disaster Relief",

"district": "12",

"twitter": "https://twitter.com/SenJaneNelson",

"facebook": "https://www.facebook.com/SenatorJaneNelson",

"picture": "none",

"committees": [1,2]

},

{

"id": 2,

"name": "John Whitmire",

"party": "Democratic",

"occupation": "Attorney",

"legistlative\_experience": "",

"district": "15",

"twitter": "",

"facebook": "",

"picture": "none",

"committees": [2]

}

]

#### /get/senators/{id}

Gets one of the senators. Example:

+ Response 200 (application/json)

    + Body

            {

                "id": 1,

                "name": "Jane Nelson",

                "party": "Republican",

                "occupation": "Businesswoman, former teacher",

                "legistlative\_experience": "Disaster Relief",

                "district": "12",

                "twitter": "https://twitter.com/SenJaneNelson",

                "facebook": "https://www.facebook.com/SenatorJaneNelson",

                "picture": "none",

                "committees": [1,2]

            }

#### /get/senators/{id}/bills

All of the Bills that this senator has authored

###List the bills [GET]

+ Response 200 (application/json)

        [

            {

                "id": 1,

                "name": "SB 63",

                "author": [1],

                "legislative\_session": "83(R)",

                "date\_proposed": "11/12/2012",

                "date\_signed": "6/14/2013",

                "date\_effective": "6/14/2013",

                "status": "Signed into law",

                "url": "http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=83R&Bill=SB63",

                "primary\_committee": 1,

                "Description": "Relating to consent to the immunization of certain children.",

                "votes": {"1": "AYE","2": "NAY"}

            }

        ]

### PUT

#### /put/senators/{id}

Update an existing senator

+ Request (application/json)

        {

            "id": 1,

            "name": "Jane Nelson",

            "party": "Republican",

            "occupation": "Businesswoman, former teacher",

            "legistlative\_experience": "Disaster Relief",

            "district": "12",

            "twitter": "https://twitter.com/SenJaneNelson",

            "facebook": "https://www.facebook.com/SenatorJaneNelson",

            "picture": "none",

            "committees": [1,2]

        }

+ Response 204

### POST

#### /post/senators/{id}

Create a new senator entry

+ Request (application/json)

        [

            {

                "name": "Jane Nelson",

                "party": "Republican",

                "occupation": "Businesswoman, former teacher",

                "legistlative\_experience": "Disaster Relief",

                "district": "12",

                "twitter": "https://twitter.com/SenJaneNelson",

                "facebook": "https://www.facebook.com/SenatorJaneNelson",

                "picture": "none",

                "committees": [1,2]

            }

        ]

+ Response 201 (application/json)

        {

            "id": 1

        }