



A Useful Adjunct of Congress*
*as opposed to Congress itself
these days

Q: Is there *anything* connected with Congress that actually works these days?

A: Yes, the Congressional Research Service and the General Accounting Office.

A key difference between these adjuncts to Congress, however, relates to public accessibility. The Congressional Research Service can be a really valuable resource, but their reports can be difficult to locate. Unlike the GAO, CRS reports aren't made available directly to the public. Access is hit-or-miss — there's even one recent occasion when the report I wanted was only available through wikileaks (though it had no national security implications of any kind.)

It's really a shame that the reports can be so hard to locate. Consider three recent CRS reports: One [report](#) provides a comprehensive roadmap to the legal framework governing offshore oil and gas. A second [report](#) provides the details of President Obama's recent climate pledge, including cross-references to other relevant documents. The third [report](#) is about recent changes in the Arctic and the issues that they present for congressional consideration. (You can find a full list of FY2012 CRS reports on energy and environment in the annual [report](#), as well as other information about CRS operations.) Such reports can be very useful sources of background information, not to mention being a great way of keeping track of recent legislative proposals.

It is baffling that GAO's reports are generally posted on its website, but CRS's reports can only be obtained from third-parties. (For instance, the three reports mentioned above were all posted on the website of the State Department's press office.) The reports that I've seen don't contain anything that could be remotely considered confidential information. At the least, it would make more sense for public posting to be the default unless members of Congress specifically request a confidential report.