

Government Relations Update



by Troy Fore, ABF Director of Government Relations



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Sometimes I get asked about how to find out about a bill that is going through Congress. Typically, ABF members who are going to make a call on a bill of interest to beekeepers want to know the number of the bill.

These answers are not always simple,

but here are some tips on how to make you knowledgeable about legislation.

First, if your goal is to let your Representative or Senators know your stand on legislation, you probably don't need the actual bill number. If it is major legislation, such as agricultural appropriations or food safety, the Congressional aides will be familiar with it. Call the Congressional office, ask for the person who handles agricultural issues and pass on your message.

To identify your Congressional Representatives, ask at your local library or newspaper – or check your telephone directory under “Government Offices.” On the Internet, your best place to start is the Library of Congress' www.thomas.loc.gov (FYI: the “Thomas” is for Thomas Jefferson).

At Thomas, you will find a variety of helpful links. To identify your Representative, click “House of Representatives” for

www.house.gov. At the top left is a place to enter your zip code and find your Representative. Click the name and go to the Representative's official Web page, where you can find lots of contact information. Most don't have regular e-mail links to make contact, but they have a Web form where you can enter your message.

Locating a Senator is simpler, since there are just two per state. At Thomas, click “Senate” for www.senate.gov. There, you can go to your state, find your two Senators, go to their official Web pages and send your message.

Now, let's check out some legislation, using the “food safety” bill as an example. It is H.R. 2749. Again, start at Thomas. In the center of the page is a “Bill Search.” Put in the bill number, if you have it, and you can go straight to a summary where you can get all the official information that is available about the bill – including the bill text.

If you don't have the bill number, put in what you think is the key phrase and search for it. “Food safety” returned 45 bills. You can see the bill number, the major sponsor, the committee(s) to which it was assigned and a committee report for those bills acted on by a committee. The committee report is a “plain language” explanation of a bill. An appropriations bill may have a lump sum for an agency, and the report may specify that the committee expects \$X.XX million to spent on a specific project. If you can't easily pick out the bill you are interested in among those listed in the search results, you will need to do more research. The sponsor's Web page may have statements about the bill, or you may want to visit the committee's page.

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How to Contact Your Congressional Representative

Representatives

Write: The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Call: 202.225.3121
Ask for your representative's office
and request to speak to the agricultural aide.

Senate

Write: The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Call: 202.224.3121
Ask for your senator's office and
request to speak to the agricultural aide.

E-mail: To locate and e-mail your representatives and senators, visit www.congress.gov.



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You can see that most of the “food safety” bills were referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce or the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation – the committees with jurisdiction over FDA. Once you have the committee, you can reach a committee’s Web page from www.house.gov or www.senate.gov. There you may find news releases on bills, record of hearings and committee actions, and even videos on the subject. Keep in mind that with major legislation, such as H.R. 2749, some provisions from other bills may be wrapped into the large bill. For example, a bill introduced by your local Congressman may never exit a committee, but some of it may become a provision of a more comprehensive bill.

In your research, don’t overlook general Internet resources. For example, a Google search of “food safety legislation” returned 2.2 million pages. The first result was a *Los Angeles Times* article that had a link to a page revealing the number and formal title of the bill passed by the House: “H.R. 2749 – Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009.” With that information, a search at Thomas is a cinch. You have to be careful, though. The fourth link offered by Google was a tempting “H.R. 875: Food Safety Modernization Act of 2009.” Happy researching.

Legislative Fund Contributions

The following ABF members contributed to the ABF Legislative Fund during the months of April through August 2009. These donations enable us to carry out the legislative initiatives that will benefit ABF members and the American beekeeping industry.

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