

**Statement of John Rutledge
Deputy Chief Information Officer, Library of Congress
Before the
Committee on House Administration, Subcommittee on Modernization and Innovation
U.S. House of Representatives**

July 1, 2026

Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Torres, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for convening this hearing and welcoming the perspective of the Library of Congress (Library). On behalf of everyone in the Library's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), thank you, also, for recognizing and continually investing in Library technology. Our work, from infrastructure enhancements to software development to Artificial Intelligence (AI) experimentation, directly supports the United States Congress. We are honored you called on us to share our experiences as you seek to better engage your constituents in the legislative process.

Good user experience, or UX, is part of our DNA at the Library. Every day, we are tasked with engaging, inspiring and informing our users—Congress and the American people. It is important that we know what our users want to see and how to best meet their needs. The Library's two most popular websites, LOC.gov and Congress.gov, garner approximately half a billion page views each year. This does not account for AI crawlers and bots, for which I will address their respective requirements separately. For the Library, UX has always been about those half a billion pairs of human eyes locked in on the way we present historical collections and legislative data across these websites.

Thoughtful and thorough user research helps us understand the people behind those eyes: what they need, what they expect, and how they feel about what they see. This is how the Library of Congress approaches UX design. Most importantly, good user research involves asking questions and listening to answers to learn **why** users interacted with our data. Our users are Members of Congress, quickly checking on a bill status on Congress.gov on their phone in the cloakroom. They are also high school history teachers like my brother, who uses Congress.gov with his students to learn more about the constitution and follow the legislative process. We have a responsibility to ensure both of those users—and countless others in between—get what they need from our websites.

As you know, AI has dramatically changed the technology landscape faster than any of us expected. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, our systems are being stressed in new challenging ways. However, AI is also giving the American people access to more information today than ever before, but authenticity and objectivity matter, and people know they can depend on Congress.gov to meet those standards. As we move forward, we will need the continued partnership of the subcommittee as well as ongoing collaboration from other legislative branch entities to focus not only on the ways we gather the data but also how we make it available.

Today I hope to outline the ways in which we are learning our lessons from the past, engaging in thorough and thoughtful user research in the present, so that we can implement effective solutions to further democratize access to information and the legislative process in the future.

Congress.gov History

In the mid-1990s, Congress tasked the Library with gathering and presenting legislative data online. Initially, we achieved this mission through two websites: Thomas for the public, and the Legislative Information System (LIS) for congressional users. As technology and user expectations evolved, it became clear that a dual website solution was not ideal. Differing approaches by each site to the presentation and discovery of legislative information led to a digital disconnect, and confusion, between Members of Congress and their constituents. Furthermore, traffic to the sites had grown to levels that strained the underlying infrastructure of these systems, and they could not be easily updated to handle new technologies such as mobile access or bulk data download.

As a result, Congress supported the Library in building a new system from the ground up: Congress.gov. Launching in beta to the public in September 2012, the new site provided an updated design, modern infrastructure that could easily expand to incorporate new content and features, mobile-friendly access, and new search capabilities.

Congress.gov has been updating and expanding since it debuted. Historical data previously unavailable online or provided through other platforms has been incorporated into the site. New features – including committee schedules and videos, and publicly-available Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports – have been incorporated. New methods to access legislative data have been introduced, including bulk data download and an Application Programming Interface (API). The modernized platform has allowed us to respond to congressional and user requests and expectations.

So, Congress.gov as it exists today is more than the sum of Thomas and LIS. It is the viewfinder that brings into focus multiple modern data flows from across the Legislative Branch alongside Library resources from CRS and the Law Library of Congress. The Congressional Data Task Force, comprised of leaders from the House, Senate, Government Publishing Office (GPO), the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Library, has made enormous strides over the last several years to update and standardize the data from each agency that makes Congress.gov the incredible resource it is.

We now serve you and your constituents from a single, constantly improving IT system, releasing a new version of Congress.gov every three weeks following the agile design process and providing rapid updates to content and features. With the site's data sources and structure drastically enlarged, now is the perfect time to turn our focus to making Congress.gov as intuitive and user-centered as possible.

Legislative Branch Collaboration

From the beginning, the presentation of legislative information through Congress.gov has been a cooperative effort across the Legislative Branch; the House, Senate, GPO, and Library are all contributing content. Collaboration is necessary due to the nature of the legislative process, but it

does introduce challenges in standardizing protocols, data formats, metadata schemas, and delivery methods. This legislative data interchange has evolved alongside Congress.gov including the adoption of United States Legislative Markup (USLM) language, developed under the direction of the Congressional Data Task Force to provide a standardized format for legislative data. Delivery in USLM enhances how data can be incorporated, discovered, and presented within the structure of Congress.gov and has been key to accomplishing often-requested features including deep-linking to specific legislative provisions and machine-readable access through the Congress.gov API.

UX at the Library of Congress

The Library is fortunate to have significant in-house UX expertise within OCIO. This group currently includes eight UX designers with user research expertise, a graphic designer, and four accessibility architects. As individual professionals, they have extensive knowledge of private sector resources, practices and standards. As a small but mighty team, they support the entire Library's software development efforts, reaching beyond our major websites to shape the Digital Library, CRS, U.S. Copyright Office, National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, and internal IT systems.

Leveraging resources from Digital.gov and other leading government technology groups, the Library uses established user-centered design principles and a repeatable 5-phase process for conducting user research. First, we **discover**. This phase involves researching and gathering everything we know from users, stakeholders, and data. Next, we **define**. Here, we identify where we need users to inform requirements and constraints. Then, we **ideate**. Collaborating with stakeholders, we explore opportunities, address pain points, and refine. This leads us to the **prototype** stage—the exciting part where we get to visualize the proposed solutions and get a sense of what the product will look like. Finally, we **validate**, testing the solutions with users. Then, we often return to the ideate stage to improve and advance our ideas based on what we heard in testing.

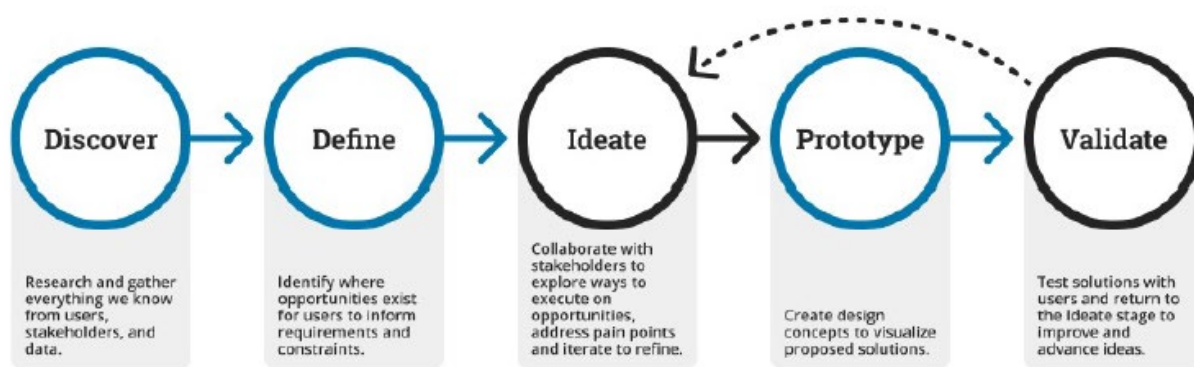


Image 1: User-centered design process

UX in Action: Congress.gov and the Public

Recent rounds of user research for Congress.gov demonstrate our process in action. In November 2025, we conducted one-on-one virtual interview sessions with participants we recruited from the public through our high-engagement channels, such as Library blogs, the annual

Congress.gov Public Forum, and media interviews. During these sessions, our UX team observed users interacting with Congress.gov along with various other websites and tools to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Each participant completed self-directed tasks while sharing their feedback and expectations along the way.

We arrived at several important themes through this round of testing. Most importantly, we saw once again that Congress.gov is a valued and trusted resource. This is a finding we never take for granted. Whatever we do to improve the site in the future, we must ensure this trust is not broken. We also saw confirmation of what we already suspected based on the sheer volume of legislative data we have: users are overwhelmed with the amount of content on the pages.

In March of this year, we conducted a second round of Congress.gov user research following similar methods. Again, we were pleased to see the positive impression Americans have of Congress.gov, the Library, and the role we play in delivering accurate and authoritative information to the public. Yet again, we also saw how the volume and nature of legislative data can be overwhelming, and the educational and informational resources on the site were either hard to find or not as helpful as we had hoped.

Beyond these structured UX activities, the Library consistently gathers public feedback about Congress.gov in other ways. A permanent feedback form on the site has generated thousands of responses over the years. Since 2020, the annual Congress.gov Public Forum has provided an opportunity for members of the public to learn more about the site and share their views with us.

As we look to the future, we are in the **define** phase of our UX process for Congress.gov. Our priorities, derived from the **discover** phase of user research, are updating the design of the site and enhancing Congress.gov search functionality. As we saw with the recent redesign of CRS.gov, the **ideate** and **prototype** phases move along at a brisk pace. We plan to have a prototype of the updated Congress.gov to validate with congressional and public users by the end of the year.

Machines as Users

Well before the retirement of Thomas, we were aware of external organizations and individuals using automated methods to “scrape” information off the website for use in privately developed products. These tools were very fragile and susceptible to breakage by simple modifications of the user interface. After the introduction of Congress.gov, this machine-based traffic grew consistently and began to impact the human experience by overwhelming system resources and interfering with site availability and functionality.

In consultation with the Library’s oversight committees, we began to provide legislative information in machine-readable formats – first as bulk data for download and then through a Congress.gov API. Since 2022, the Congress.gov API has made structured, bulk data available to those who know how to use the technology. The Congress.gov API supplies data to scores of legislative information websites and apps, many of which have been created by engaged citizens. In May 2026 alone, the Congress.gov API was used to submit more than 330 million requests for information.

With the rapid growth of AI assistants, machine access to Congress.gov has once again grown considerably. On average, the site serves about a quarter of a million human visits per day. In May 2026, we saw a daily average of half a million requests coming from AI crawlers and assistants. This tells us that the information available at Congress.gov is no longer limited to the site. Our content now appears in AI-assisted search results as well as web, mobile, and desktop AI applications. It is now necessary that we treat this machine access of Congress.gov, and other Library web properties, as a distinct class of users and take their methods and needs into consideration as we update our information platforms.

Recent Activity

Starting June 16, 2026, Congress.gov saw an enormous spike in automated traffic that generated excessive search requests to the site. Unlike the traffic we see through the API, this increased volume of activity bore the hallmarks of web scrapers or AI training crawlers designed to access sites through the same interfaces as human users. This extraordinarily high volume consumed system resources and degraded performance for public users. We implemented a number of measures to control this traffic, including the addition of a human verification check to the search page, which significantly improved the site's performance. In a single 24-hour window, this human verification check blocked approximately 98% of incoming requests as nonhuman traffic. This measure allowed us to ensure your constituents could still reach Congress.gov search results. We will continue to encourage the public to use our bulk data download offerings, and to that end, we hope this hearing and the subcommittee can help raise awareness of this available resource.

What's Next

As noted earlier, years of work required to retire legacy IT systems and update the infrastructure and data sources powering Congress.gov have finally brought us to the right time to reimagine ways the site is used and accessed. Our most dedicated users know the resources we offer. Now, we can focus on those who are approaching legislative data and information in new ways.

We are eager to put our UX findings to work and give Congress.gov a reimagined new interface. As mentioned previously, we anticipate being able to show you our initial ideas by the end of the year. In the near term, we would love your partnership as we seek feedback from the full breadth of congressional users. We especially want to engage with staff who use Congress.gov to respond to constituent inquiries or who may receive direct feedback from constituents regarding their own use of the site. Their insight can directly assist in designing an improved experience for users who may not be reached by other outreach efforts from the Library. Your staff can serve as the voice for your constituents in this effort.

We also encourage continued support from the subcommittee for the Congressional Data Task Force-led Roadmap for Publishing Legislative Documents in USLM XML Format and related efforts across House offices and the GPO. Receiving legislative information in this modern structured format gives our staff more room to be innovative in how it's presented, searched, and accessed.

Two items within the Library's FY2027 budget request are of critical importance to the longer-term enhancement of the Congress.gov user experience. The Artificial Intelligence (AI) Enterprise Platform will enable the Library to develop, refine, and manage models using responsible deployment of AI technologies. The request for Web Application Delivery and Management Improvements would follow Federal Cloud Smart strategies to utilize cloud-based processing, networking, storage, and application services for delivery of Congress.gov.

Moving Congress.gov from a Legislative Branch-managed data center to cloud hosting will strengthen our capacity to meet increasing machine traffic demands, expanding and contracting as needed. Adding resources to the current on-premise infrastructure is comparably slower and increasingly more expensive, making it difficult to adjust to sudden spikes in usage.

The AI Enterprise Platform will enable experimentation with and implementation of AI-based tools and enhancements to systems across the Library, including Congress.gov. One idea we are actively exploring is how the popular "Ask a Librarian" feature on LOC.gov could further enhance the Congress.gov search experience. Congress.gov users already appreciate how this feature connects them with reference librarians from the Law Library of Congress. We want to investigate how AI tools, when properly grounded to the authoritative data we manage and prompted by a curated set of questions we have gathered from user research, could provide an additional discovery option for users who want more help with the site.

Our metrics have historically shown that both congressional and public users enter Congress.gov through web searches and, increasingly, AI assistants. Our user research into the use of AI tools on Congress.gov has also yielded findings that you, as Members of Congress, will uniquely understand: people feel strongly about AI. Approaching Congress for accurate and authoritative information is unlike approaching any other entity, such as a customer service provider or business. Users may be willing to interact with an agent or a bot in some use cases, but they want as few intermediaries between themselves and their elected representatives as possible. We are confident we can meet the needs of both audiences, and will continue to pursue improvements that strengthen, not weaken, the trust the public places in Congress.gov.

In closing, the Library of Congress is grateful for the continued partnership of this subcommittee as we work together to expand access to the authoritative, objective, and trustworthy legislative data and information we provide. I look forward to answering your questions and continuing this conversation beyond today's hearing.