

MEMO

Date February 19, 2026
To Robert R. Newlen
Acting Librarian of Congress
From Kimberly F. Benoit
Inspector General
Subject Management Advisory Memorandum – *Review of the August 2025
Constitution Annotated (CONAN) Website Display Error*

This memorandum provides the results of our review of a widely reported issue associated with the Library of Congress's (Library's) CONAN website that occurred in August 2025. We identify possible actions for the Library's consideration in addition to actions it has already taken, although the actions we identify do not represent formal recommendations.¹

We provided a draft copy of this memorandum to the Library and they did not provide a formal response.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies extended by the Library.

CC: Deputy Librarian for Library Collections & Services
Director, Congressional Research Service
Law Librarian of Congress
Chief Information Officer
General Counsel

¹ This memorandum is for informational purposes. The review was not conducted in accordance with the Government Accountability Office's *Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards* or the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluations*.

Executive Summary

Between August 4 and August 6, 2025, the Library-managed Constitution Annotated website (CONAN) failed to display the Constitution in its entirety. This was reported in the media and noted across various social media platforms. The purpose of this memorandum is to report our observations regarding the incident, describe the root cause of the incident, and identify opportunities to improve processes.

The failure was caused by newly added annotations missing mandatory metadata, complicated by human error in republishing files without the required metadata after the problem had first been corrected. We found that, due to system limitations, significant manual intervention is required to ensure that the annotated constitution loads properly when updated. Based on our review, no instances of wrongdoing or influence from outside the Library came to our attention regarding the error. The Library acted quickly to remedy the situation and has proposed and planned actions that are likely to reduce the risk of this type of error in the future.

Through the course of developing this management advisory, we engaged with Library management. Based on our conversations, management is aware of, and responsive to, the problems identified. As a result, we are not issuing any recommendations to the Library but will continue to monitor progress and evaluate this topic for a future audit cycle.²

Background

The Constitution Annotated has been in publication for over 100 years. The Library has maintained and continuously operated CONAN, the website that publishes the Constitution Annotated, since 2010.³ The Library has adhered to file formatting standards used by the Government Publishing Office (GPO) to facilitate physical printing of the Constitution Annotated once a decade, as required by law.⁴

CONAN is one of only a few Library systems that crosses multiple service units. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) performs the annotations and updates. However, the Law Library serves as the system and data owner because CRS is not a public-facing unit.⁵ The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) provides technical support to CRS and the Law Library for hosting and troubleshooting.

When the Supreme Court releases decisions or CRS staff determine that an update to the Constitution Annotated is necessary, a CRS staff member updates the files that form

² Due to its informational nature, this memorandum was not prepared in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards or Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency standards.

³ Letter dated November 17, 2010, from Sen. Schumer to Robert Tapella, Public Printer of the United States.

⁴ 2 U.S.C. § 168 requires a full version of the Constitution Annotated be prepared every ten years and an update from the last full version every two years until the next full version is printed again. 44 U.S.C. § 501 requires GPO to do Congress's printing.

⁵ The Library plans to move the CRS staff working on CONAN to the Law Library. According to the Library, this will better align the staff who prepare CONAN with those who engage the public on CONAN.

the basis of the website using a staging tool that synchronizes files through a git⁶ repository. CRS staff then copy XML⁷ files from the git repository, edit them to reflect updates from constitutional scholars, and then upload them to servers where they are formatted as web pages that are viewable by the public. As part of the annotation process, CRS assigns topics to each constitutional annotation to aid readers in understanding the update and finding relevant content when searching CONAN. These topics are displayed on the web page of the annotation, and users can click on the topics to see related annotations. In fiscal year 2025, CONAN had almost 15 million visitors and over 27 million page views.

CONAN is classified as an operational system, meaning that there is no ongoing system development. CONAN costs approximately \$521,000 to operate on an annual basis, funded by OCIO and CRS. Historically, funds have not been allocated for development or system upgrades. OCIO budgets about \$171,000 to maintain CONAN, which includes the cost of needed software licenses. CRS estimated an annual cost of \$350,000 to update the website's content, excluding the costs associated with researching and drafting content and formatting the content to meet GPO specifications.

CONAN Uploading Errors were Classified as a Major Incident Once Identified

On August 5, 2025, the Law Library received notice from the public that there was missing text on CONAN. Law Library staff confirmed the situation with OCIO that afternoon, and OCIO staff created and uploaded a corrected version of the XML file to the git repository. On August 6, that file was inadvertently overwritten with an earlier, uncorrected XML file at 10:57 am and again at 12:06 pm. A ticket was created shortly thereafter, and the matter was soon reclassified as a major incident. By 4:45 pm, the ticket was closed, the XML having been reformatted and republished to CONAN.

The Library notified the public via social media posts on X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram on August 6 and 11. In addition to social media, the Library added a notification to CONAN around noon on August 6 that said, "The Constitution Annotated website is currently experiencing data issues. We are working to resolve this issue and regret the inconvenience."

OCIO conducted an internal review shortly after the events and provided the report of that review to OIG. The report includes extensive analysis and screenshots of the update process of August 4-6, including details of the XML topic tag, times and dates of file transfers, and records of communications of Library staff involved. The review disclosed the topic tag was missing from one link to an essay about Article I, Section 8, Clause 12 ("the Army Clause"). The analysis states that CONAN requires the topic tag

⁶ "git" is a version control software that is free to use and widely adopted in the development of software and other projects where maintaining version control of files is important.

⁷ Extensible Markup Language (XML) is a system for storing, transmitting, and reconstructing by assigning user-defined attributes to certain words or phrases to aid in exchanging data between systems and platforms. XML uses "tags" to identify aspects of data that are of interest to users or systems.

to be present to correctly process the file for display on the web. When the XML file was uploaded, CONAN detected the error and did not process the remainder of Article I.

Following the review, OCIO and CRS met to review the publication process and solidify each office's understanding of their role in publication. Additionally, OCIO reported that they had updated the XML schema⁸ to assist with verifying properly formatted XML.

XML Issues Were Identified as the Root Cause of the Display Errors

CRS provided our office with a demonstration of the steps they take to update CONAN. CRS reported that the system used to move files from the git repository to the web server has developed problems with certain XML tags, particularly topic tags and footnote tags. Occasionally, certain topic keywords will cause problems. Additionally, a CRS staff member indicated that the "staging server" used to visually check web pages before they become visible to the public did not always reflect what the public would see and that it "crashes a lot."

On August 4, 2025, a CRS staff member made a routine update to the annotations reflecting recent Supreme Court decisions. As part of this update annotations were added to the Army Clause. A problem with a tag in this page caused the annotations web page to display incorrectly. The change was reversed and the annotations republished. However, the text of the Constitution, on a separate web page, was truncated at the subsequent clause, Clause 13, causing the remainder of Section 8, as well as Sections 9 and 10, not to display.

We reviewed screenshots and timelines related to the August 2025 incident. Most notably, the missing sections of the Constitution are exclusively after the Army Clause, consistent with an XML parsing error at the location of the update that could have been caused by a missing tag, as described by OCIO.

Opportunities Exist to Improve CONAN

As previously stated, the budget for CONAN has only been sufficient to support system operations, not development or upgrades. OCIO personnel represented that when the Library received the mandate in 2010 to manage CONAN on the internet, it was not accompanied by funding to do so. For this fiscal year, OCIO has recommended a funding request to ensure continuous improvement of the IT systems supporting CONAN, as well as evaluating additional tools to supplement identifying potential XML errors. The Library is also considering incorporating additional review steps to their workflow and expanding the review process between CRS and the Law Library.

As part of this review, we discussed possible long-term solutions with an XML expert at GPO who advised writing a more robust XML schema that may simplify error detection

⁸ An XML schema is a document that defines how a particular XML document should be structured, such as required tags and attributes. A tag identifies content and defines the structure of an XML document, while an attribute provides additional data (metadata) about a specific tag.

and correction at the editor's level, rather than relying on manual review and the associated increased likelihood of human error over automated checks.

Legislation proposed in the House may affect the Library's plans for updates to CONAN. HR 1234, passed unanimously on March 31, 2025, would repeal the requirements for CRS to prepare a hardbound version of the annotated Constitution and replace it with a digital version. The bill's proponents say it will save the Library \$4 million over 4 years and reduce the amount of time required by CRS, freeing staff to more directly support the work of Congress. This change, if enacted, could simplify the publication process and allow the Library to streamline the CONAN backend by replacing XML with HTML and reducing the amount of time spent resolving errors in XML without having to commit resources to upgrading the XML schema.

Methodology

To perform this review, we sent inquiries to CRS, the Law Library, and OCIO, as well as GPO to understand how CONAN is operated and maintained, its history within the Library, and GPO's relationship to its regular physical publication. We performed a walkthrough with CRS personnel to gain an understanding of the process to update CONAN and reviewed documentation related to the incident. This memo is based on the replies to those inquiries.

Conclusion

We found that upon identification of the error, the Library took steps to ensure that the CONAN website was updated to reflect the entirety of the Constitution. The root cause of the issue was an XML error, and opportunities exist for the Library to improve the overall functionality of CONAN.

Our office will monitor CONAN's performance going forward and consider whether to include CONAN in our audit planning process. We provided a draft of this advisory memo to the Library and they did not provide a formal response.