Flash!

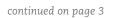## MapLight and California Secretary of State team up to launch an open source campaign finance search tool

Californians will have an easier time tracking the money going to state political candidates and ballot measure campaigns with Power Search, a new search interface developed by MapLight for the California Secretary of State's campaign finance database. The tool is now live at http://powersearch.sos.ca.gov/.

For years, California has had a database, called CAL-ACCESS, which collected information about the players who had access to political power and who gave money to which campaigns. But like a coin thrown into a fountain, information went in, but it was tough to fish out. The CAL-ACCESS website, designed to make political campaign spending accessible to the public, was confusing and difficult to use. Deciphering how much funding went to support or oppose a ballot measure involved

Secretary of State Alex Padilla, MapLight President & Co-Founder Daniel G. Newman, and MapLight Data Director Miriam Marks demonstrate the state's new Power Search tool for searching political campaign contributions

MapLight and CA Secretary of State streamline access to independent expenditure information in California

Soon after the launch of the California Secretary of State's new Power Search tool for campaign finance data, Map-Light continued its partnership with Secretary Alex Padilla's office with the release of a new online search engine to track outside political spending. The tool offers a new level of clarity on the previously murky topic of independent expenditures (IEs), or donations made by wealthy individuals and politically active organizations operating independently of campaigns. Like the campaign finance tool, the new IE tool is also available at http://powersearch. sos.ca.gov/.

Outside groups have spent millions of dollars to influence election outcomes—this tool is a window into that world.

Political spending funneled through independent campaign committees has exploded in the Golden State in recent years, topping more than $80.6 million in the 2014 election cycle, and rising almost eightfold since 2002.

MapLight built its own tracking system to allow simple and powerful searches ranging from candidates to donors to what the money was used for, making it significantly easier for users to find and analyze data on unlimited campaign spending in California. The changes represent a significant upgrade from the information that was previously available through the Secretary of State's old system, which treated the funds like a secondary part of the political money machine.

"What used to require expertise and days, even weeks of research can now be done in seconds," says MapLight President Daniel Newman.

With the passage of Proposition 34, a 2000 state ballot measure that created new limitations on contributions made directly to candidate-controlled campaigns, big money simply shifted to political committees that can raise unlimited funds. Under the proposition, these activities are permissible by groups as long as they don't coordinate with the candidate or official campaign. What happened in California foreshadowed what's taken place across the country, with the rise of super PACs since the U.S. Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling in 2010.

The new database was covered by many outlets, including KQED and the Sacramento Bee.

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SPOTLIGHT: New MapLight Staff

Issac Agree

Program Associate, helps the Voter's Edge team to expand and improve its digital voter guide. Prior to joining MapLight, he worked as an operations analyst in the legal services industry and as a research assistant for a consulting firm doing evaluation and strategic planning in the philanthropy sector. Isaac holds a B.A. in Political Science and Anthropology from the University of Vermont, and his interests include history, political theory, popular fiction, and jazz.

Elliott Day

Program Associate, helps the Voter's Edge team to expand and improve its digital voter guide. He brings with him a variety of experience in local politics, field campaigns, and city government. He earned a B.A. in Geography from the University of Chicago. Elliott's interests include bicycles, books, and maps.

Joanna Nix

Researcher, provides research support for Voter's Edge. Prior to joining MapLight, she researched and managed wrongful conviction cases at an investigative journalism-based innocence project. She graduated from Brandeis University with a B.A. in Anthropology and minors in Journalism and Classics. Her interests include music, theater, and hiking.

Skippy Williams

Project Manager, works with MapLight's users, partners, developers, and other stakeholders to lead the creation of websites and transparency tools, identifying which features will have the greatest impact. He is former product manager for the Government Transparency suite at Granicus, co-founder of The Jack and Buena Foundation, and a self-proclaimed adventurer. He has a degree in Computer Science from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Kylie Baranowski

Executive Assistant, supports MapLight's Deputy Director and development team by assisting with fundraising, project management, record keeping, and impact tracking. Before joining MapLight, she served as a Jesse M. Unruh Fellow in the California State Assembly and worked as a case administrator in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. She received a B.A. in Political Science from the University of California, Irvine, where she graduated summa cum laude.

Chelsea Miller

Program Associate, provides logistical and research support to the Voter's Edge team. Her previous experience includes extensive work on foreclosure prevention and affordable housing protection in Rhode Island. She graduated from Rhode Island College with a B.A. in Sociology.

Alec Saslow

Communications Director, leads MapLight's strategic communications and media outreach. Prior to joining MapLight, Alec managed communications activities, including campaign strategy and media relations, for a variety of nonprofit organizations in Washington, D.C. Alec is a Colorado native and holds a B.A. in Public Relations from Syracuse University.

Mia Zuckerkandel

Managing Editor, oversees MapLight's editorial content. She previously worked as an Executive Producer at KQED and as Senior Digital Editor for The Center for Investigative Reporting. Prior to CIR, she was the news editor for The Bay Citizen.

U.S. Congress contributions data provided by the Center for Responsive Politics (OpenSecrets.org) and the Federal Election Commission (FEC.gov) and legislative data provided by GovTrack.us. California contributions data provided by the National Institute on Money in State Politics (FollowTheMoney.org) and the California Secretary of State (Sos.ca.gov).

Spending by pro-gun interest groups correlates with failure to pass background checks for gun buyers

Senator Pat Toomey (R-Pa.), left and Senator Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), right; Wikimedia Commons

While President Obama took executive action to reduce gun violence through enhanced background checks, stricter definitions for gun sales, and investments in mental health services and gun safety technology, MapLight was busy exposing the influence that pro-gun interest groups have exerted on gun legislation in recent years.

The last time Congress took action on background checks was in 2013, following the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, when an amendment sponsored by Senator Joe Manchin (D-W. Va.) and Pat Toomey (R-Pa.) was stopped by a vote of 54-46.

The measure would have provided a stricter background check process to prevent criminals and those deemed mentally ill from purchasing a gun. In the final voting analysis, MapLight found that between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2014:

- Senators who voted against the amendment received, on average, 11 times more money ($25,631) from pro-gun interest groups than senators voting for it ($2,340).

- Six senators received more than $50,000 from pro-gun interest groups. Of those, only one (Pat Toomey (R-Pa.), also a co-sponsor of the amendment) supported the stricter background check process.

- In contrast, campaign contributions from anti-gun groups to senators in the same period were negligible.

MapLight's research on the money behind gun control legislation has been picked up by various local outlets throughout the nation.

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individually downloading sometimes dozens of spreadsheet files, manually combining them, and combing through thousands of rows of data.

Through the Secretary of State's newly adopted Power Search, users gain a fuller view of the totals spent for specific elections as well as where industries and other special interests are concentrating their money. The search engine also filters results by location, dollar amounts, and time periods back to 2001. Now, it's possible to filter and find campaign finance information that was previously inaccessible or buried deep within the system—all in a matter of seconds.

With Secretary of State Alex Padilla's support and funding from The James Irvine Foundation, MapLight created the software as open source code, making it publicly available for anyone to use and build on. Power Search vastly improves the search-and-sort functions of the Secretary of State's campaign finance data.

"Power Search is a dynamic tool that will increase transparency and provide the public and the press a clearer view of the flow of campaign dollars," Padilla stated at its September launch.

Through this partnership, MapLight is helping to revolutionize how projects like these are created. Government tech projects can be time-consuming and expensive. In contrast, using our expertise in software development to advance political transparency, we were able to unlock the data hidden in CAL-ACCESS in six months, with a $100,000 grant from The James Irvine Foundation.

"It is our hope that other states and cities will adopt this code to modernize their own money in politics search engines, and that other programmers will build upon MapLight's code to make it even better," says MapLight President Daniel Newman.

Media response to Power Search has been tremendous, with TV and radio coverage by major outlets including NBC, ABC, CBS, KCRW, and print coverage by the San Francisco Chronicle, the LA Times, the Sacramento Bee, and more. The San Francisco Chronicle wrote that, with Power Search, the performance of the state's system for searching political donations "has gone from that of a VW Bug to a Tesla."

We're hiring!

MapLight is seeking an **Executive Assistant** to provide critical strategic and administrative support to MapLight's President. This role is a unique opportunity to gain exposure to exciting new projects and partnerships at a growing nonprofit on the cutting edge of journalism and citizen engagement.

For more detail, and a list of all open positions at MapLight, please visit http://maplight.org/jobs.

Flash! A NEWSLETTER FROM MAPLIGHT

Tracking the money behind opinions on climate change in Congress

Despite President Obama's rejection of the proposal to construct the Keystone XL pipeline on the basis of climate change concerns, oil and gas interests have had a visible impact on opinions in the Senate.

An analysis by MapLight of S. Amdt. 58, an amendment that failed to pass but that would have expressed the sense of Congress that "human activity significantly contributes to climate change," found that between April 1, 2009 and March 31, 2015:

• Senators who voted against the amendment received, on average, 7.1 times as much money ($259,314) from oil and gas interests compared to those voting for it ($36,759).

• Twelve senators received more than $300,000 from oil and gas interests during this same period. All voted against the amendment.

The amendment failed by a vote of 50-49.

David Merrett/Wikimedia Commons