

Flash!

A NEWSLETTER FROM **MAPLight.org**

ISSUE 08 / SUMMER-AUTUMN 2009

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We're all aTwitter!

New Twitter feeds:



MAPLight.org:
twitter.com/maplight
Daniel Newman:
twitter.com/danmaplight
Steve Toub:
twitter.com/setoub



New Facebook page:
facebook.com/maplight

From the Executive Director **Health Insurance Reform, Advancing Journalism**

Continuing hard-fought efforts to reform United States health care have focused the light of the media and MAPLight.org's researchers on the connection between health industry contributions and members of U.S. Congress.

Our research team has found:

- Senators who signed a letter supporting the "public option" received **half as much money** from **health insurance firms** as those who didn't sign.
- Senators on the Finance Committee who voted against the public option received **twice as much money** from **health insurance firms** as those who voted in favor.
- Senators on the Health, Education and Labor committee who voted to prevent imports of prescription drugs received **three times more money** from **pharma firms** than senators voting to allow imports.

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MAPLight.org Los Angeles



We're thrilled to announce that this May, after months of preparation, we launched a new website to shine a light on money and politics for the second largest city in the country, Los Angeles.

This public site is the first project of its kind for any U.S. city. MAPLight.org Los Angeles provides unprecedented insight into the influence of campaign

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You're Invited!

Webinar: Intro to MAPLight.org // January 6, 2010

MAPLight.org is a premier example of the growing Web 2.0 movement to improve government transparency. New to our organization? Want to discover more about what we do? Learn more and get your questions answered. Join us for a special conference call/webinar on Wednesday, January 6, 1 p.m. Pacific (4 p.m. Eastern).

To sign up visit www.maplight.org/briefing

'Money Near Votes' Tracks Special-Interest Funding to Congress Within Days of a Vote

MAPLight.org in August released Money Near Votes, a new government transparency tool that tracks campaign contributions from special-interest groups given within a month, a week, or a day of each vote in Congress.

This public, web-accessible data mashup combines information on congressional votes with campaign contribution data from the Center for Responsive Politics.

This new level of transparency hones in on the role special interests play in shaping public policy. "Never before have these 'well-timed' campaign donations been highlighted in such an exhaustive, easy-to-locate format," said Daniel Newman, MAPLight.org's executive director.

For example, if you use the Money Near Votes tool to follow the money for the House vote on H.R. 627, the Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights Act of 2009, you'll see that the banking industry contributed \$271,029 in campaign contributions to House legislators within two weeks of the House's vote on this bill.



The Money Near Votes tool shows each legislator along with their campaign contributions and votes. For example, Rep. Addison Wilson (R-SC) voted 'No' on the Credit Card bill on April 30, 2009. He received \$2,000 from the American Bankers Association on April 27, three days earlier, and \$5,000 from the Credit Union National Association on April 29, the day before the vote. Both groups opposed the Credit Card bill.

Contributions shown include contributions from companies, industry political action committees, and company employees.

"Companies would not invest in politicians' election campaigns if it didn't buy them influence or access," said Newman.

"Never before has it been so easy to connect the dots between campaign contributions and legislators' votes," said Newman. What used to take days of manual research is now available at the click of a mouse."

Moving Up!

MAPLight.org has come a long way since we started in a tiny, rented spare bedroom. We're thrilled to announce our move to a spacious new office at 2223 Shattuck Avenue, in downtown Berkeley. Stop by and visit next time you are in town.



From left: Daniel Newman, Executive Director; Steve Toub, Research Associate; Michele Horaney, Communications Director; Emily Calhoun, Research Director; DeAnna Dalton, Development Associate.

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MAPLight.org Los Angeles

contributions on elected officials, tallying the interest-group money pouring into candidates' coffers. MAPLight.org researchers have categorized 19,000 contributions totaling \$10 million for the 2009 election cycle alone.

Special interests would not be funding politicians' election campaigns unless they wanted something in return. MAPLight.org Los Angeles shines a much-needed light on the river of money that flows through Los Angeles government. We're excited to be providing the transparency citizens need to make informed decisions at the polls and hold their elected officials accountable.

Site: maplight.org/losangeles

New Faces

We are pleased to welcome **Doug Edwards** to the MAPLight.org Board of Directors. Doug was the first marketing director at Google, where he oversaw consumer marketing and brand management from 1999 to 2005. Prior to that, he managed marketing communications for the San Jose Mercury News, directed communications for KQED FM in San Francisco and was Novosibirsk correspondent for the public radio program Marketplace.

Steve Toub, our new Research Associate, gets hands-on with the data that MAPLight.org publishes, analyzing trends and outliers for insights and quality assurance, and developing operational plans and specifications on how to acquire, import, clean and test new data sets. Steve has 15 years of information science experience, primarily as a consulting information architect and a software product manager for academic libraries.

Assisting with MAPLight.org's project management and fundraising is new Development Associate **DeAnna Dalton**. DeAnna's previous experience includes working with nonprofits in Ecuador and Tanzania and leading a Stanford service organization.

Also joining MAPLight.org is Communications Director **Michele Horaney**. Michele formerly managed public affairs and was public affairs writer at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Prior to joining Stanford, she was a reporter and editor at newspapers in Illinois and California.

Pamela Heisey, who has been communications director, becomes communications consultant, and will depart at the end of the year for school at the University of California, Berkeley.

James Madison Freedom of Information Award



The James Madison Freedom of Information Award for Electronic Access was presented in March to MAPLight.org by the Society of Professional Journalists-Northern California. Staff members at the award ceremony, from left, Daniel Newman, MAPLight.org Executive Director; Emily Calhoun, Research Director; Andrew Page, Associate Director; Pamela Heisey, Communications Director, and Neil Drumm, Lead Developer.

Sharing Our Data with an API

MAPLight.org researchers comb hundreds of news articles and Congressional hearings to gather up-to-date information on what companies, organizations and interest groups support and oppose bills in Congress. We've always shared this data with people who requested it, but we've never had an easy, automated means to do so, until now. Our new Bill Positions API ("Application Programming Interface") is a software tool that provides live, up-to-date feeds of our research on companies, organizations and interest groups in support or opposition to key bills in Congress.

"The MAPLight.org Congress API was designed to help talented software developers create the next government transparency killer app to hold elected officials accountable," said MAPLight.org's executive director Daniel Newman.

MAPLight.org is making our research freely available to foster transparency and promote participatory democracy. Websites GovTrack.us and OpenCongress.org have already begun using our API to publish our research on their own websites, adding to their coverage of bills in Congress. Data distributed through our API is viewed 700,000 times per month on sites beyond MAPLight.org, vastly magnifying our impact.

Open Secrets Open Data

We applaud the Center for Responsive Politics (opensecrets.org) for opening up their data for free use by MAPLight.org and all other nonprofit groups. In July, MAPLight.org software developer Neil Drumm created a type of software program called a Drupal module that makes it easier for certain websites to import and work with campaign contribution data from Open Secrets. We published this module under an open-source license so that it is free to use and modify by anyone.

INTERVIEW:

JOURNALIST LEWIS DOLINSKY

In this time of so many needs and urgent issues, what makes MAPLight.org stand out?

Big money in politics may be the unfixable problem in our political system. But we can't afford to act as if it's unfixable. MAPLight provides an invaluable and nonpartisan service. What money did legislators receive? When did they receive it? How did they vote on measures of interest to those who gave the money? You can say that legislators get money because they vote a certain way rather than vote a certain way because they get the money. Either way, it's bad.

I have grudgingly accepted the idea that MAPLight does not draw conclusions. It provides the facts and highlights them. Then it's up to you.

How did you become involved with MAPLight.org?

At a MAPLight reception a few years ago, a Republican from Arizona, Marc Spitzer, talked about how a system of publicly funded elections worked in Arizona and in Maine. It was a good idea that had been tested successfully, but only in small states.

My concern was that in California, with big money profiting from the status quo and with voters resistant to new spending, this kind of change wouldn't be accepted, even though it would save taxpayers money in the long run because decisions would be more likely to be made in their interest instead of for special interests. And in fact, a public financing measure was put on the ballot prematurely and lost big.

The public financing initiative for the June 2010 ballot in California covers only the secretary of state's office. That's the easiest sell. Who wants the person running our elections to have to beg for campaign money for her own election?

MAPLight now concentrates on providing data for journalists and the public so they can make the connection between the money that legislators receive and legislative votes on specific bills. This is incredibly useful work, even if it is not as satisfying as changing the system (which may, in fact, be a pipe dream).

Besides campaign finance reform, what other political issues interest you?

This country desperately needs cost-effective universal health care, which every other industrialized nation has, and a renewed emphasis on education as the foundation of a successful society and successful economy. Also a simplified tax system, but one that remains progressive. Environmental protection should be perceived as common sense rather than kooky or fanatical. In foreign policy, our leaders need to hear from those who actually know something about other countries and are not simply parroting ideology.

If there was one thing you would change in our political system, what would it be?

Do I have to stick to one thing? I want campaigns to be about issues



and competence, not name recognition, good looks or sound bites. Districts should be drawn fairly. Severe restrictions on money in politics, although I know the Supreme Court won't let me have them because it regards money as free speech. An end to term limits because they give us legislators with little expertise, leaving government to the lobbyists for whom there are no term limits.

What would you want other donors to know about your experiences with MAPLight.org?

My experiences with MAPLight have been positive. The staff seems serious about the work and the mission — very focused. This is a long-term project, and unfortunately it needs to be. With the decline of newspapers and the dumbing down of society, an organization like MAPLight is essential.

MAPLight.org supporter Lewis Dolinsky is a veteran journalist who spent 26 years at the San Francisco Chronicle as an editor and foreign affairs columnist.

Reports on Climate Change and More

Our detailed report **How Money Watered Down the Climate Bill** traced the cap-and-trade energy bill through committee after committee as politicians backed by special-interest donors made the bill less effective. This report is at <http://maplight.org/how-money-watered-down-the-climate-bill>

View other reports at <http://maplight.org/maplightnews> or via rss at <http://maplight.org/rss.xml>

Help Us Shine a Light



To keep shining a light on money and politics, we depend on your support. The end of the year approaches.

Please make a donation now, online, at <http://maplight.org/donate>.

cont. from page 1: **Health Insurance Reform, 13 Million Served, Our Niche**

- Democrats who voted with big pharma received **four times as much pharma money** as those who voted against.
- **Blue Dog Democrats** received more health insurance funds than **House Republicans**.

Full reports on health care and other topics can be found at MAPLight.org and via rss at <http://maplight.org/rss.xml>. In the twelve months ending October 31, 2009, we reached more than 13 million people with our findings on Marketplace radio, Fox Business News, and hundreds of other news outlets.

Advancing journalism

MAPLight.org's advances come at a time when investigative journalism, long relied upon to expose legislators' misdeeds, is imploding. Sharp cuts in newspaper staff and funding make it difficult for traditional media outlets to devote the time and resources necessary to uncover money and politics stories.

MAPLight.org fills a critical journalistic need, providing money and politics data, tools and expertise beyond what any one news organization or journalist can maintain on their own.

For journalists, MAPLight.org provides simple access to compelling, objective data, eliminating conjecture about whether a legislator is influenced by a contribution and reporting instead on real correlations between the money they get and the way they vote. Our research team routinely fields requests for custom analyses which find their way into news stories across the country.

Earlier this year, MAPLight.org was honored to receive the James Madison Freedom of Information Award at an inspiring ceremony put on by the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. The award is named for the creative force behind the First Amendment and honors

journalists and organizations who have fought for public access to government meetings and records and promoted the public's right to know.

At the awards ceremony we met with journalists committed to keeping an eye on government despite the dire cutbacks in resources for investigative journalism. I'm inspired by their resolve and proud to be helping their efforts with our groundbreaking transparency tools. With media outlets cutting back on investigative reporting and record amounts of money flowing into American politics, MAPLight.org's transparency work is more critical than ever. Thank you for your support as we work to shine a light on our broken system of money-dominated politics.



MAPLight.org Named 'Best Reference'



The prestigious Library Journal named MAPLight.org a Best Reference in their April 2009 issue. Our research team puts tremendous effort into ensuring our data are both accurate and useful, and we are proud that the quality and value of our work has been recognized with this honor.

WE'RE HIRING!

Join our focused, high-impact team. Help boost government transparency. For job openings and internships visit <http://maplight.org/jobs>

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MAPLight.org is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization based in Berkeley, California. We illuminate the connection between Money and Politics (MAP) using our groundbreaking database of campaign contributions and legislative votes.

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Flash! A NEWSLETTER FROM MAPLight.org

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER USING SOY-BASED INKS

VICTORY IN CALIFORNIA!

We're thrilled to let you know that MAPLight.org has won public access to the California government's database of how state lawmakers vote.



In December, 2008, working with our partner, the First Amendment Coalition (FAC), we filed a lawsuit seeking public access to this critical civic information. Following our lawsuit's settlement in June, the state now publishes a comprehensive database of Senate and Assembly bills and votes, updated daily. Any member of the public can now download the database at <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov>.

Our agreement with the state settles our lawsuit so long as the state continues to provide this critical data to the public. The state paid \$65,000 toward our attorney's fees as well.

Dozens of blogs and media organizations discussed the story, including

MAPLight.org Settles Lawsuit, Wins Public Access to State's Database of How Lawmakers Vote

KQED radio where a four-minute interview can be heard at <http://bit.ly/KQEDdatabasesuit>

"It shouldn't take a lawsuit for the government to realize its data belongs to the people," said Daniel Newman, Executive Director of MAPLight.org. "In this new era of transparency, we hope that this settlement serves as an example to city and state governments across the country to provide public access to public information."

MAPLight.org will use this new bill-and-votes database to create a new government transparency website, MAPLight.org California, modeled after our award-winning MAPLight.org Congress site. Our new California site will combine data on all money given to members of the California state legislature with the newly available database of how each politician votes, revealing patterns of money and influence never before possible to see.

California legislative data, including how lawmakers vote, legislation in progress, and laws, was previously available to the public only in a plain-text format on the California Legislative Information website. That data was suitable for viewing and printing, but only allowed access to Legislative data at a rate of one bill at a time, making analysis lengthy and cumbersome.

"No longer can legislators use the complexity of the legislative process, and the sheer volume of bills and votes, to hide the favors they are doing for special interests that fund their elections," said Peter Scheer, executive director of FAC. "The more voters know about the influence of money on their elected representatives, the less tolerant they will be."

Special thanks to Peter Scheer from FAC and our attorney Rachel Matteo-Boehm, a partner at Holme, Roberts & Owen LLP in San Francisco, for their tireless efforts to free California's legislative data for all who wish access it.