

# Flash!

A NEWSLETTER FROM **MAPLight.org**

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## IN THIS ISSUE

Shining the Light on Congress

Contributions from the  
Payday Loan Industry

Public Financing for Elections

Intern Spotlight:  
Tiffany Poovaiah

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## From The Executive Director

Some people see a problem and take it on as an immediate challenge. Others take a step back and seek to address root causes.

Supporters of MAPLight.org fall into this second category. Individually we have different priorities and agendas, but we share a common understanding that our broken campaign finance system is the root cause of many problems.

From health to environmental to consumer issues, our legislators put special interests before voters' interests because they need money to run for office. We must address this fundamental problem to make progress on all issues possible.

MAPLight.org pursues openness, efficiency and effectiveness both in what we work on and how we work on it. With just three people on staff we are revolutionizing the way the U.S. understands the impact of money on politics. We've designed our MAPLight.org web site to be flexible, open, and easy-to-use, and to harness the network effects of the wide community of people concerned about money and politics.

We are proud to have earned the support of people who think rigorously about how to make the most of their resources. We, in our turn, will continue to be rigorous in making the most of your support. Thank you.

## SHINING THE LIGHT ON CONGRESS

What would you buy for \$952 million? U.S. Congress?

That's how much it would cost. That's the amount that all candidates for House and Senate collected for the 2006 elections.

MAPLight.org is pulling back the curtain on what special-interest campaign donors are getting for their dollars. We're expanding our groundbreaking money/votes database to U.S. Congress.

Our new U.S. Congress site will integrate those \$952 million in contributions with how every U.S. Senator and Representative is voting on every bill. The site will be updated in real-time, including votes from Congress just as soon as they are published on government websites, and data from the Center for Responsive Politics.

In addition to comprehensive data for U.S. Congress, our new site will include:

- An innovative new interface and graphic design, to make finding the information you want appealing and simple
- Customization tools, to let journalists, bloggers, and citizen leaders pull out just the data they need, for any bill, legislator, or issue



*Web 2.0 Expo: Sean (left) and Andrew demonstrate the MAPLight.org site at the Web 2.0 Expo in San Francisco. We were one of a handful of nonprofits there and received great press coverage, including an article on the homepage of Wired.com.*

- "Add an Organization" feature, to solicit research from the broad Internet community on what organizations support and oppose legislation. MAPLight.org research staff confirms the accuracy of these user-submissions and then adds them to our growing database.

Our expansion to Congress is fueled by the tremendous response to our California legislature site, which launched just six months ago. Funding for this expansion comes from the Sunlight Foundation in Washington, DC and from our many individual supporters like you.

U.S. Congress

Interest Groups

Legislators

Bills

*Our new U.S. Congress site is even easier to use than our current site, with an all-new graphic design.*

## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE PAYDAY LOAN INDUSTRY

In May MAPLight.org is releasing its first report on money and politics outside of California. The report analyzes giving patterns of the Payday Loan industry in ten states.

The Payday Loan industry profits from people on the brink of poverty. The industry targets people who live from paycheck to paycheck and offers cash between checks at unconscionably high interest rates. Some companies charge as high as 500% APR. Almost 90% of the industry's income comes from "loan flipping," the practice of extending follow-on loans to pay off previous ones. Congress recently passed regulation to educate military personnel and their families about the pitfalls of payday lenders, but in many states the industry is "regulated" by laws that are very favorable to the industry.

Among the findings we can report at this time:



- In Utah and Idaho close to 100% of the campaign contributions from the industry come from outside the state
- In Texas 100% of the Senate got money from the industry – an average of about \$8,000 per legislator

We look forward to many more special interest reports ahead, and welcome your suggestions for reports on other money and politics topics.

## PUBLIC FINANCING FOR FEDERAL ELECTIONS

A bipartisan bill to bring full public financing to Congressional elections was introduced by Senators Durbin (D-IL) and Specter (R-PA) in late March.

The Fair Elections Now Act, modeled after similar systems currently working in Arizona and Maine, would provide public funds to qualifying candidates that agree not to accept private donations beyond a small amount of 'seed' money.

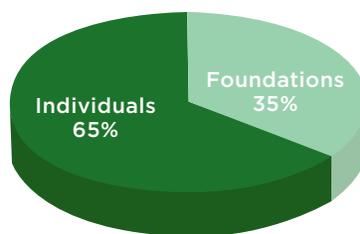
The measure would give Congressional candidates, both challengers and incumbents, sufficient funds to run for office without making them dependent on special interest contributions.

It would also relieve them of the burden of dialing for dollars and attending fundraisers, so they could focus more on representing their constituents. Said Durbin, "Special interest money will always find new loopholes to work its way into campaigns until we change the system fundamentally."

## DONATE

MAPLight.org would have never made it this far without the support of individuals who recognize the fundamental problem of money's influence on American politics.

Please join us by contributing at: [www.maplight.org/donate](http://www.maplight.org/donate)



Total Contributions to Date  
March 2005 - April 2007  
\$308,267

## INTERN SPOTLIGHT TIFFANY POOVAIAH

To keep our U.S. Congress database current, MAPLight.org researches who supports and opposes at least thirty pieces of legislation each week. The bulk of that work is done by our wonderful Research Interns, most of whom are Political Science majors or recent graduates, like Tiffany Poovaiah.

Tiffany has been interested in politics since she was eight years old. She started her internship with MAPLight.org after completing her Political Science degree at the University of California, Berkeley. "What I love about it is that it's actual research, not copying or filing," Tiffany said. "And it's practical information that people can use."



Tiffany has been a key researcher of U.S. Congress legislation and of the influence of

the payday loan industry on state legislation, for MAPLight.org's upcoming

research report on this industry. Tiffany was especially interested in seeing the strategy with which the industry gave contributions, focusing on key legislative players, such as the House Speaker and other prominent members. "By doing this type of research you get a practical understanding of how the legislature works, much more practical than what you get in the classroom," says MAPLight.org Research Intern Tiffany Poovaiah

Without the work of our Research Interns, MAPLight.org's overhead costs would double. We owe a great deal of our efficiency and productivity to our reliable and dedicated interns. Thank you.

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For more information, please write to [info@maplight.org](mailto:info@maplight.org) or visit our website at [www.maplight.org](http://www.maplight.org)