From the Executive Director

Wow, just one year? It’s hard for me to believe that we launched our flagship website for U.S. Congress in May, 2007, less than a year ago. We’ve broken new ground in government transparency, won international awards and earned coverage of our unprecedented data by preeminent news outlets.

Just a few weeks ago we were named a Politics nominee for a Webby, the “Oscars of the Internet.” I am proud to see our website honored with the likes of NPR.org and the Pew Forum on Religion and Politics. At the same time, our mission is unlike that of any other group represented in the Webby “politics” category. We are not simply providing information; we are illuminating how our money-dominated political system is broken, in order to build momentum for change.

Thank you for your role in building MAPLight.org. Our success is your success.

A WEBBY NOMINATION AND MORE

MAPLight.org is a finalist or nominee for awards in three contests that will be determined in May.

We are one of 20 finalists in the Public Administration category of the Stockholm Challenge, an international contest for the best public-benefit technology projects that attracted 1,400 entries from around the world. We are a featured Project of the NetSquared Challenge, where we will win at least $2,000 in late May, and maybe much more. Last year we won first prize, and $25,000. (For more information about our NetSquared Challenge entry, see Fundraising Corner: Mapping Money and Politics, next page.) Finally, we have been nominated for a Webby Award, one of five nominees in the politics category.

The Webby Awards are the “Oscars of the Internet,” in the words of the New York Times. Other nominees include NPR and the Pew Forum on Religion and Politics. It is extraordinary that an organization as small as ours has earned the admiration of such a wide audience.

SHINING A LIGHT ON MAPLIGHT.ORG

MAPLight.org received 21,335 website visits in March 2008. You can find this statistic, along with fundraising and budget information, in the newly updated “About Us” section of our website. By publishing our site statistics and financial information, we’re seeking to set a tone of transparency that we hope other organizations will adopt too.

We’ve also added a “Take Action” page, in the “Participate” section of our site, with things you can do to communicate the problems with money and politics. If you haven’t already done so, please take a moment to renew your support of MAPLight.org today by filling out the enclosed envelope, or going to: www.maplight.org/donate

Thank You!
OUR RESEARCH DATA IN THE NEWS

Since bringing our money and politics data up to real time and hiring Communications Director Pamela Helsey, MAPLight.org’s data has started earning the press attention it deserves. Some highlights of our recent media coverage:

HR 1424 (House Mental Health Parity Bill)

MAPLight.org’s data in a Congress Daily article about the bill: “Groups that opposed a mental health parity bill that passed the House Wednesday gave five times the amount of campaign contributions to lawmakers than proponents over the past two years, according to data from MapLight.org, a nonprofit organization that tracks campaign money and members’ votes.” 85% of the 9,600 Congress Daily readers work for the Federal government.

HR 3373 (House FISA Bill)

Wired.com’s Threat Level blog cited MAPlight.org’s data in an article about AT&T, Sprint and Verizon PAC donations given to legislators: “Political action committees for telecoms being sued for privacy violations gave more than $10,000 on average to each Congress member who voted to give amnesty to telecoms being sued for illegally helping the government spy on Americans, according to an analysis done by MapLight.org, an organization devoted to using new technology to show the influence of money on government.”

The National Journal Group featured MAPLight.org’s data in a Congress Daily article about the bill: “Groups that opposed a mental health parity bill that passed the House Wednesday gave five times the amount of campaign contributions to lawmakers than proponents over the past two years, according to data from MapLight.org, a nonprofit organization that tracks campaign money and members’ votes.” 85% of the 9,600 Congress Daily readers work for the Federal government.

FUNDRAISING CORNER: MAPPING MONEY AND POLITICS

Our entry for the NetSquared Challenge this year is Mapping Money and Politics, a “mashup” showing campaign contributions on a map. It creates a new and appealing way of understanding money and politics. It’s no wonder they can’t take straight action on the serious problems facing our country.

We are so excited about incorporating these mapping tools into MAPLight.org that we have already hired a programmer to make it happen. We hope that some of the cost will be offset by being a featured project of the NetSquared Challenge, and we can ask for help, too. The Mapping Money and Politics project will cost $50,000. Help us place Money and Politics maps in newspapers and blogs across the country.

To learn more about the project, see our three-minute video at: www.maplight.org/mapping_money_and_politics

RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT

CHRIS CLARK

Meticulous researcher Chris Clark has volunteered at MAPLight.org for nine months. His current assignment, laying the groundwork for our planned project to track votes in Congressional committees, is crucial for the project’s success. As always, he is up for the challenge. Currently, MAPLight.org data relies on Congressional floor votes to knit money and politics data together, but it is in the cloistered atmosphere of committees that powerful special interests are able to quietly kill or alter legislation that affects us all. Chris is investigating how MAPLight.org can make key committee votes publicly available in our web database. His work will help us make MAPLight.org exponentially more powerful.

“(Chris) is investigating how MAPLight.org can make key committee votes publicly available in our web database. His work will help us make MAPLight.org exponentially more powerful.

“Navigating all of the various committees and subcommittees is daunting,” Chris admits, but he remains steadfast. “If any aspects of our government lack transparency, that’s a problem… if MAPLight.org can illuminate the relationship between campaign donations and committee action in a clear, accessible way, then journalists, activists, and concerned citizens would have a powerful tool at their disposal.”

Chris’s work at MAPLight.org has given him hope for real reform. “I was excited by the freshness of MAPLight.org’s approach, and it’s made me realize just how powerful the Internet can be as a tool for social change.”