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Our MAPLight.org team changed this summer as Emily Calhoun joined us as research director, and former research director Sean Tanner moved on to pursue a Masters in Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley. Those of you who have had the pleasure to meet or work with Sean during the last three years will understand that we are sorry to see him go, and we wish him all the best in his career ahead.

WELCOME EMILY!
MAPLight.org welcomes Emily Calhoun, our new Research Director. Emily has extensive research and project management experience that draws from academia (economics research), media (television news coverage and documentary films), and business (a foreign language translation service start-up). Her broad experience is a major asset as MAPLight.org expands to cover more legislatures and reach more newsdesks.

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You’re Invited!
Save the Date! Come to our House Party in Menlo Park, CA on Sunday October 5th. Join us for a demonstration of our new tools for money and politics transparency and a discussion of our plans for the future.

For details contact Andrew Page at andrew@maplight.org or (510) 868-0894.

Flash!
A NEWSLETTER FROM MAPLight.org

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Donor Profile — Melissa Dyrdahl
Fundraising Corner — Host a house party
Knight-Batten Journalism Award

OUR ORGANIZATION
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WARRANTLESS WIRETAPPING, MONEY AND POLITICS
On March 14, 2008 213 Democrats voted for an amendment that rejected language granting retroactive immunity for telecom companies that participated in the government’s warrantless wiretapping program. On June 20th, 94 of those Democrats reversed their position and voted for a bill that includes retroactive immunity.

Here’s a sampling of the media coverage: public radio stations in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Washington, DC; 1110 Newstalk in North Carolina; International Free Speech TV; Democracy Now!; CBS News website; the Inquirer (UK); Wired News; Media General News Service – DC Bureau; Daily Kos; The Hill’s Blog Briefing Room; Huffington Post; MichaelMoore.com; Washington Independent; Colorado Independent; the Kansas City Star; Hartford Courant; Denver Post; Moderate Voice; Time.com; Village Voice; and Politico.

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MAPLIGHT.ORG RECEIVES KNIGHT-BATTEN JOURNALISM AWARD

We are honored to receive an Honorable Mention in the 2008 Knight-Batten Awards for Innovations in Journalism. The award judges had this to say about MAPLight.org:

"Every taxpayer should take a hard look at this site. Never before have citizens been able to so easily track the influences on their elected officials."

AN INTERVIEW WITH MELISSA DYRDAHL
MAPLight.org Supporter

Melissa Dyrdahl is a former executive of a large software company in Silicon Valley. Her personal opinions about public policy are her own and do not reflect the opinions of her former employer. Melissa is currently the CEO and Co-founder of Bring Light, Inc., a website for social change that connects donors and charities for more informed and effective online fundraising.

How did your work with your previous employer bring you in direct contact with the world of DC politics?

One part of my team led a cross-functional strategy to combat software piracy—this included marketing efforts, technological innovation, as well as public policy work. I was often the ’company executive’ (one needed a title to secure a meeting with higher ranking government officials) who traveled to Washington, DC to meet with Senators and members of Congress. This role provided me with a unique window into world of DC politics.

Can you give me an example of the challenges you faced while in DC?

I once met with a very influential Congressman who was the Chair of a Committee that had a lot influence on intellectual property policy issues. We talked, I explained my company’s position, I told him I’d appreciate his support, and we determined that he was, in fact, aligned with my company on the policy at issue. Then, a week later, I was called by someone in his office who asked me to make a financial contribution to that said Congressman’s campaign (I live in another state than the one this Congressman represented). Since my company didn’t have a PAC, the Congressman obviously assumed that I would personally make a contribution to his campaign.

Did you notice any operational differences between Silicon Valley and Washington, DC?

Silicon Valley, for the most part, is egalitarian. We place value on innovation, staying ahead of the competition, measuring results—there is a sense of urgency to everything we do. It requires focused and efficient teams to deliver results.

In DC, a Congressperson’s importance can be judged by the location of his or her office. Success is measured by influence, connections, and ability to work the system. There are also two layers at work in DC, the elected official or “temporary worker” and the people who are making sure the government infrastructure operates 365 days a year, even when the elected officials pack up and leave at the end of their term. And, just as with a corporation, the larger an organization gets, the greater its complexity, and harder it is to put process around it. I noticed there’s a fossilization that occurs with the layers of bureaucracy in DC that creates inertia. It’s easy to get tangled in a web of bureaucracy.

If you could make one change to our political system what would it be?

The electoral college for presidential elections is an antiquated system and no longer meets the needs of the voters. Now – through television, the web, and jet travel – candidates have the ability to reach a vast number of voters during their campaigns and don’t need to rely on elections where supposedly will have greater wisdom than voters. Each candidate should be elected based on the number of individual votes they receive, and every voter should feel that their vote counts when they cast it.

What prompted you to support MAPLight.org?

Shortly after a meeting in Washington DC I went to a MAPLight.org house party and I thought, this is really great, a logical, easily accessible way to make the facts available. I was delighted to see something that gives the common person power to understand the financial support that has made this groundbreaking project possible.

MAPLIGHT.ORG IS COMING TO LA!

Coming in 2009: a MAPLight.org site tracking money and votes for the Los Angeles mayor and city council. This project will set a new standard for government transparency for cities and towns. We are deeply grateful to the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation for the financial support that has made this groundbreaking project possible.

MAPLIGHT.ORG ON THE ROAD: NETROOTS NATION

MAPLight.org staff Sean Tannier and Emily Calhoun at the Netroots Nation bloggers conference in July in Austin, Texas. Thousands of bloggers learned about MAPLight.org’s powerful research tools and website widgets.

MAPLIGHT.ORG LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE FEATURES

MAPLight.org rolls out a new Website. The new design features Hot Topics, Current Bills in Congress, and a Comments Section to encourage interaction with visitors. Our site enhancements also include our newest transparency tool, the Committees Tool, that reveals the river of money that flows through all bills in Congress and a “Take Action” page, in the Participate section of our site. Our current action is urging the Senate to pass S. 223 and start filing their bills in Congress and a “Take Action” page, in the Participate section of our site. Our current action is urging the Senate to pass S. 223 and start filing their campaign contributions electronically. 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

FUNDRAISING CORNER:
Host a MAPLight.org House Party!

Our little organization has been taking big strides in the world of online government transparency. Our work could excite a wide audience who might never know about us if they didn’t hear about MAPLight.org through their friends and associates.

By hosting a house party you can expand the circle of people who know of MAPLight.org and our work. To learn more about hosting a house party please contact Andrew Page at andrew@maplight.org or (510) 868-0894.