It’s been an amazing political year—with a new President-elect—and the opportunity for reforming our broken money and politics system is upon us. MAPLight.org is playing a key role in building momentum for that reform—at the local, state and national levels.

We begin our expansion to state legislatures in the year ahead with MAPLight.org sites planned for Iowa, Wisconsin and New York State. All three states are poised to take up money and politics reform.

In addition to state expansion, we will launch Los Angeles MAPLight.org next spring in time for the city’s election for mayor and city council. Our data will give L.A. voters an unprecedented view into the ties between money and politics in the second-largest city in the country.

Just before the national election, we launched a national research report, ‘Remote Control.’ This comprehensive report, which included “money maps” for every member of Congress, was featured on CNN, the national radio show Marketplace and more than 50 other media outlets.

With your help, MAPLight.org will continue to shine a spotlight on our broken political system. Let’s not let this historical moment slip by without making the systemic change our country needs.

Thank you for your support.
One week prior to our historic national election, MAPLight.org launched a research report entitled, “Remote Control: U.S. House members raise 79% of campaign funds from outside their districts.”

Our research team, led by Research Director Emily Calhoun, found that 79% of campaign contributions to members of the House of Representatives came from outside their districts. Almost all members of the House (97%) received the majority of their campaign contributions from outside their districts, and 91 members of the House received 90% or more of their campaign contributions from outside their districts.

Dan explained it this way: “To win an election, a House candidate has to raise an average of $1.3 million in campaign funds—that’s $2,500 every working day for an entire two-year term. With such a herculean fundraising effort required, what time and attention do Representatives have left to address the interests of the voters they represent?”

MAPLight.org researchers also found that, of the top 20 contributing Zip codes, 15 are from Washington, DC and its surrounding areas.

More than 50 media outlets covered our findings, including prime time coverage on the Lou Dobbs show on CNN and the national public radio show Marketplace. Our report also inspired a CNN.com online poll.

When elected officials like Rep. Tanner try to disassociate themselves from our broken money and politics system, it paves the way for reform.

NEW GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY TOOLS

We are proud to introduce you to two new MAPLight.org transparency tools. The first is our Comments Section, an online collaborative tool that allows journalists, citizens and nonprofit groups to exchange information and ideas and engage in meaningful debate. The second is a Money and Votes Widget.

COMMENTS SECTION

We invite you to share your cognitive surplus and post a comment on our newly-launched ‘Comments Section.’

The Comments Section works like a blog in the sense that you can read others’ opinions and post your own. But what sets MAPLight.org’s Comments Section apart is that it’s integrated into an already existing architecture of government transparency tools.

Comments can be posted to every bill and legislator in Congress. The Comments Section has a unique RSS feed so you can stay up-to-date on the latest comments with your RSS reader. This new online collaborative tool provides citizens, nonprofit groups and journalists with a comprehensive look at all bills and legislators in Congress.

MONEY AND VOTES WIDGET

Track important legislation on your blog or website with MAPLight.org’s Money and Votes Widget

The Money and Votes Widget reveals money and vote correlations for every bill in Congress. The Widget to the right shows that money and votes were in alignment for the vote on the Consumer-First Energy Act of 2008. It reveals that oil producers gave an average of $134,821 to each of the 43 senators voting ‘No’ and an average of $37,373 to each of the 51 senators voting ‘Yes.’ The bill subsequently failed to pass.

U.S. CONGRESS: MONEY AND VOTES WIDGET

Big Oil Gave $135,000 per Senator, Energy Bill Died.

Consumer-First Energy Act of 2008

Groups who did want this bill, such as Independent Oil & Gas Producers and Major (multinational) Oil & Gas Producers, gave an average of:

$37,373

Groups who did not want this bill, such as Environmental Policy Groups, gave an average of:

$134,821

To each legislator voting Yes

To each legislator voting No

S. 44, S. 3044 - Senate Vote June 10, 2008: 51 Yes - 43 No

Visit us at MAPLight.org

With access to multiple viewpoints, MAPLight.org’s community can be better informed to make decisions about elected officials and bills in Congress.

FUNDRAISING CORNER: State Expansion

Since the launch of our U.S. Congress site in March 2007, MAPLight.org has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in building the best tools available for analyzing and parsing money and politics data. From the start, our vision was to bring these government transparency tools to every state legislature and to hundreds of cities and towns.

In 2009 we will launch MAPLight.org for the state of Iowa, to illuminate money, votes and bills for that state. We will also re-launch our prototype California site with data up to the present-day. Going forward, the California and Iowa sites will be updated daily, in real-time. With support from the JEHT Foundation we will further expand the site to include Wisconsin and New York State. The John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation is underwriting our 2009 launch of MAPLight.org Los Angeles, a groundbreaking model for showing the connection between money and votes in cities.

We are currently raising the $2.4 million needed to provide our groundbreaking government transparency tools for the next dozen state legislatures, covering 63% of the U.S. population. While that might sound like a lot of money, a good percentage of that price tag is start-up costs. After start-up, the average state will cost less than $60,000 per year to operate. Your contribution now will help us build the base of support to sustain MAPLight.org. You can also help us by spreading the word to people you know across the country.

MAPLight.org has built the tools to track money’s influence on legislators at the local, state and federal levels. Help us grow to meet the need for transparency, accountability and reform by making monthly contributions through our Light Keepers monthly giving program.

Contact Andrew at 510-868-0894 or andrew@maplight.org, or visit www.maplight.org/light_keepers.
DONOR PROFILE: AN INTERVIEW WITH GAIL KAISER

Gail Kaiser is a Bay Area marketing and project management consultant and mother of two. She has a background in the high tech industry and degrees in both business and economics.

Why MAPLight.org — tell us how this organization came into your life?

My son had cancer. We were lucky, we caught it early. We had good insurance and I was able to leave work to take care of him. But the experience got me looking at the current healthcare system in this country. I know that despite the billions of dollars our country spends on health insurance, we waste billions on overhead and leave too many kids and young adults untreated or bankrupt if they get seriously sick.

If special-interest campaign money didn’t distort the conversation on healthcare in the U.S., I don’t think we would spend our healthcare dollars so inefficiently and unfairly.

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A couple of years ago there was a proposition for campaign finance reform in California. I got a mailing from the California Nurses Association saying that if special-interest campaign money didn’t distort the conversation on healthcare in the U.S., I don’t think we would spend our healthcare dollars so inefficiently and unfairly.

My son had cancer. We were lucky, we caught it early. We had good insurance and I was able to leave work to take care of him. But the experience got me looking at the current healthcare system in this country. I know that despite the billions of dollars our country spends on health insurance, we waste billions on overhead and leave too many kids and young adults untreated or bankrupt if they get seriously sick.

INNOVATIONS IN JOURNALISM AWARD

MAPLight.org was honored to receive an Honorable Mention in the 2008 Knight-Batten Awards for Innovations in Journalism. The awards spotlight information providers who create opportunities to involve citizens in public issues and supply entry points that invite their participation. The award judges said 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.”

In this time with so many needs and issues, what makes MAPLight.org’s work a priority for you?

I tend to look at things and ask, “how are they set up to encourage or discourage behavior? What are the incentives or disincentives inherent in a system, whether it’s for keeping the house tidy or looking at why people behave the way they do?” I think the information MAPLight.org provides shows how our money and politics system creates the wrong incentives for our legislators. People need to look more at that system.

People don’t understand how much our current system of private campaign financing actually costs us. We wouldn’t be in this economic crisis if the financial industry hadn’t been able to buy so much consideration of their point of view and avoid supervision.

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

Complete public financing for campaigns. People don’t understand how much our current system of private campaign financing actually costs us. We wouldn’t be in this economic crisis if the financial industry hadn’t been able to buy so much consideration of their point of view and avoid supervision. We’re paying in plenty of other ways as well: special tax loopholes, uncompetitive bids, unnecessary spending, undercharged or uncollected fees, shoddy services, defective products, overpriced government services, etc. MAPLight.org helps show that there is a lot of money being spent on legislators, and those spenders are getting good value for their cash. MAPLight.org can really raise the awareness of this.