

# Flash!

A NEWSLETTER FROM **MAPLight.org**

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## You're Invited!

Special Webinar: Intro to MAPLight.org - March 25th

MAPLight.org is a prominent example of the growing Web 2.0 movement to improve government transparency. If you are new to our organization, want to discover more about what we do, or would like to introduce us to people you know, this is a great opportunity to learn more and to get your questions answered. Please join us for a special conference call/webinar on Wednesday, March 25th, 1:00pm PDT (4:00pm EDT)

To sign up visit [www.maplight.org/briefing](http://www.maplight.org/briefing)

## The Transparency Trend

### From the Executive Director

Our new president is placing government transparency front and center.

President Obama's first executive orders promoted the release of government records and instituted groundbreaking ethics rules. He has promised to make government documents and data available on the web on an unprecedented scale. He has even quoted former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, saying "sunlight is the best disinfectant."

This January, President Obama's transition team approached me for advice on how to reach its transparency goals. I take that to be a strong endorsement of MAPLight.org's pioneering work illuminating the role of special-interest money in politics. I am thrilled that our innovative organization is part of the burgeoning movement to open up government for everyone, which itself is part of the broader Internet-driven trend towards greater transparency in all parts of society.

In 2008, we established MAPLight.org as an important new resource for uncovering connections between money and politics. We reached millions of voters as CNN, the public radio show "Marketplace," and hundreds of newspapers, TV stations and radio shows across the country cited our research. Last year we appeared in 252 print and online news stories, 78 radio and TV stories, and 1,088 blog posts.

We analyzed our 2008 news coverage and found that 70% of our coverage came from just seven topics; most of them "hot" breaking news stories. To maximize our effectiveness going forward, we are focusing our research resources to generate more in-depth data more quickly for this type of story. *cont. on page 3*



# MAPLIGHT.ORG IN THE NEWS

## MAPLight.org Files Public Records Lawsuit Against State of California

On December 3, 2008, MAPLight.org and the California First Amendment Coalition (CFAC) filed a lawsuit against the California Office of Legislative Counsel in an effort to gain access to the state's electronic database of how lawmakers vote.

Why is this lawsuit necessary? The state currently publishes legislative voting records on a state-operated website, but in a text format that is suitable only for viewing and printing. We at MAPLight.org want the state to give us a copy of the underlying database so that we may match the legislators' votes to campaign contributions of supporters without having to scour the equivalent of a 10,000-page printout. The state so far has denied MAPLight.org's freedom-of-information request for a copy of the database file of public information on how our lawmakers vote.

Under the California Public Records Act, "the law is clear that the public has a right to obtain these records in a useable electronic format, and that's what we're after,"

said Rachel Matteo-Boehm, a partner in the San Francisco office of Holme, Roberts & Owen LLP, the law firm representing MAPLight.org and CFAC in the case pro bono.

"The government works for the taxpayers," added Daniel Newman, MAPLight.org's executive director. "California may not keep its database of basic democratic information hidden from the public. It will be a brighter day for all of us when government sees itself as working for the public who pays the bills."

Why has the Office of Legislative Counsel of California been reluctant to embrace transparency as mandated by law?

"The Legislature is obviously afraid that release of the legislative database to MAPLight.org will make it too easy for voters to connect financial contributions by special interests to specific votes and other accommodating actions by legislators," said Peter Scheer, executive director of

CFAC. "And legislators should be worried. But fear of embarrassment is hardly a basis for withholding government records from public view. Just the opposite."

The filing of the lawsuit captured nationwide media attention. Newman discussed the lawsuit as a guest on KTVU's "Mornings on Two" and "The Angie Coiro Show" on KKGN (960 AM) radio. An Associated Press story about the case also appeared on 20 media websites, including Businessweek.com, Forbes.com and Portfolio.com. Twenty-five newspapers up and down California, from the Eureka Times Standard to The San Diego Union Tribune, have also written about the dispute.

In addition, several California media outlets have echoed MAPLight.org's frustrations and written editorials urging lawmakers to 'free the data.' Here are excerpts from the San Francisco Chronicle and The Sacramento Bee:

## San Francisco Chronicle

EDITORIAL John Diaz | Sunday, December 7, 2008

### Open the windows to the state Capitol

It should not take a lawsuit to open the windows into the legislative activity within the state Capitol. These are the people we elect, operating with the money we provide them, to perform the people's business.

But a lawsuit filed last week ...underscores the degree to which the California Legislature has been corrupted by arrogance and allegiance to special interests.

There is no mystery about why California politicians might be reluctant to cooperate with MAPLight. The nonprofit, nonpartisan group has set up an easy-to-navigate way for voters to track the connection between contributions and votes in Congress. ...

I have no doubt the group would find rich terrain in Sacramento. As readers of our editorial pages over the years

know, one of my pet peeves is the tendency of legislators to fail to vote — a practice known as "laying off" or "taking a walk" — on particularly controversial consumer and environmental issues. Time after time, I have found a direct correlation between nonvoting legislators and the flow of special-interest contributions...

On Friday, Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, suggested that a resolution may be coming soon.

"When there is no additional burden on government to turn over the information in a user-friendly format, we ought to be stretching and going out of our way to do that," Steinberg said by phone.

This lawsuit needs to be settled. Fast. Its mere existence is a blight on the California Legislature.

## The Sacramento Bee

EDITORIAL December 5, 2008

### Data is public's, and so is database

If you want to know how your legislator voted on one particular bill, it's easy enough to find that out. Look up the bill number online and follow the prompts that guide you to all the committee and floor votes taken on that piece of legislation. They will reveal which legislators voted for or against it.

But if you wanted to know something more, like how your representative voted on all bills related to air pollution or to teacher tenure issues or to auto insurance — well, good luck. Obtaining that kind of information could take days or weeks of research.

And if you wanted to do even more sophisticated tracking — to find patterns in a legislator's votes that showed possible connections between campaign contributions from a particular interest group with a stake in legislation, forget it. It's almost impossible.

The data is there to answer those questions, and it's supposed to be public. But so far, the Legislature's lawyer has refused to release it in a format that enables citizens to easily track voting trends over time or make correlations between votes and campaign contributions.

A glance at MAPLight's Web site makes it clear why California legislators might want to block access to the data the organization seeks. Using an electronic database, MAPLight has collected and aggregated congressional campaign contribution and voting records in a way that allows the public to see with a click of the mouse which interest groups are the biggest campaign contributors to individual lawmakers and how lawmakers vote on issues that those contributors care about.

No doubt some of that information will prove embarrassing to some legislators, but that's no reason to deny the public access to it.



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... non-partisan calculation by [maplight.org](http://maplight.org) shows the uaw contributed an average of 74 hundred dollars to each yes vote it got in the senate...compared to 147 to each no vote. and that's over a period of seven years, this fight started a long time before the big three bailout hit the senate floor.david mattingly cnn, atlanta, president bush ...

Good Morning America

## FUNDRAISING CORNER: MEDIA SPONSOR

With just five people on staff, MAPLight.org is a small organization that does a lot with a little. Some things, though, require more time and attention than we are able to dedicate to them, and tracking our media coverage is one of them.

Pamela Heisey, our Communications Director, recently demoed a media tracking service and we learned that our in-house tracking was missing a great deal of MAPLight.org coverage. For instance, we learned that our CNN story about the auto bailout was repeated on local television news shows in Philadelphia, Pa., Jacksonville, Fla., Shreveport, La., and 18 other cities and towns across the country.

Capturing television news coverage of MAPLight.org data is particularly important because 70% of Americans get their news from television broadcasts. When we reach this huge audience and demonstrate how money in politics affects current issues

we are reaching a lot of people who might not be exposed to this insight through any other means.

Pamela has done outstanding work earning media coverage for MAPLight.org over the past year, but we can't take credit for this success if we don't know about the stories. You can help us improve our media tracking, by becoming a Media Sponsor.

Media Sponsors are supporters with a specific interest in developing MAPLight.org's communications work. Each Media Sponsor makes a tax-deductible contribution of \$1,000. The support of just 10 Media Sponsors will pay for services and staff to monitor our media coverage better so we can demonstrate the full impact of our tools for government transparency. Please consider becoming a Media Sponsor and help us make this crucial organizational investment.

To become a Media Sponsor you can mail a check, contact Andrew Page at (510) 868-0894 ext.105, or simply contribute online at [maplight.org/media\\_sponsor](http://maplight.org/media_sponsor). Thank you.

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The Transparency Trend

In the year ahead, we will continue to update our Congress site daily, launch MAPLight.org for Los Angeles and for New York State, and revamp our California site so that it's current and updated daily.

MAPLight.org was among the many organizations impacted by the Bernard Madoff scandal. The JEHT Foundation, one of the foundations forced to close due to Madoff's malfeasance, had granted us funding for an even more robust expansion in 2009. Our planned sites for Iowa and Wisconsin, originally scheduled for 2009, are now on hold pending future funding.

Thank you for supporting our government transparency tools. In 2009 we will reach even more people and continue to connect the problems we face as a country with the river of money that runs through our legislative system.

be better off. I see politics as the art of compromise, and we have devised a system where politicians are rewarded for not compromising. If you represent a conservative district and you take the most conservative position and hold fast, your district will still support you, but nothing gets done. Why should you compromise? We can't have a system that can only make decisions when we are faced with a crisis.

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

I'm a believer that small, focused organizations can often make the biggest difference. MAPLight.org does one thing and does it well. Sometimes larger organizations get lost in their bigger missions. If you believe that sunlight is an antiseptic, you will get the highest return on your dollar when you support an organization which provides that sunlight.

I like real linkage between my money and a specific result. I've been impressed with the quality of work and the idealism at MAPLight.org. The work it does is 100% in alignment with its mission.

There is a critical need today for someone to do what MAPLight.org is doing. It's extremely important when politicians have so much TARP and other money to spend that we keep the process honest and transparent and maintain the public's trust in our political system.

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*Craig Johnson has been recognized by BusinessWeek as one of Silicon Valley's top 25 "movers and shakers"; by Red Herring magazine as one of nine Silicon Valley "top power brokers"; by the National Law Journal as one of the 100 most influential attorneys in America; and by Forbes magazine as one of the country's top private company investors. He lives in Portola Valley, Calif., has two sons and is an avid cyclist and movie lover.*

## DONOR PROFILE: AN INTERVIEW WITH CRAIG JOHNSON

Craig Johnson is CEO and a co-founder of Virtual Law Partners LLP (VLP), a virtual law firm. Prior to co-founding VLP, Craig was chairman and co-founder of Venture Law Group, a law firm specializing in representing high-technology companies.



### Why MAPLight.org?

I was invited by Greg Gretsch (a MAPLight.org board member) to a MAPLight.org presentation about campaign financing reforms. I have always been interested in the political process, especially how our current way of electing representatives is biased toward candidates who can raise more money. I found MAPLight.org's efforts to shed light on the relationship between political donations and voting records very useful and interesting.

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

I am also interested in the way political districts are drawn, particularly here in California. Gerrymandering makes most races non-competitive, which leads to incumbents having little incentive to compromise. One of the reasons we are in such a budgetary mess in California right now is because of an unwillingness by both parties to compromise. On one side you have the Republicans insisting on no new taxes and on the other side you have the

Democrats and their supporters insisting on no cuts in service.

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

Someone said, "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste." When you get into a fiscal crisis like the one we are in now, people are going to get real. In California, politicians have been playing political games for months while the state budgetary process has languished, but now they are being forced to confront the true issues and compromise. I'm interested in ways to make our elected representatives more responsive to the voters and eliminate the bias and corruption caused by their constant need to raise money. MAPLight.org is one such way.

I believe in disclosure as a prophylactic and in harnessing the power of the press to keep politicians honest. MAPLight.org's correlations (though they do not show causality) show some very suspicious patterns. I hope at some point that we can find a systemic solution to these problems, but in the meantime the best we can do is try to disclose unseemly behavior and hold legislators accountable, just as putting a bright light on a dangerous street corner at night provides a deterrent.

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

Competitive elections are the most important thing. If politicians feel that they're not guaranteed re-election and have to reach out to constituents of all parties in their districts, we'll

## A RIVER OF MONEY FLOWING TO HOUSE REPS VOTING YES ON AUTO BAILOUT

In early December, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Auto Industry Financing and Restructuring Act, which authorizes the federal government to loan up to \$14 billion to the country's three ailing automakers. MAPLight.org's research department revealed that over five years (January 2003 - October 2008), auto manufacturers, auto dealers and labor unions together contributed an average of \$74,100 to the campaign of each representative who voted for the auto bailout, compared with an average contribution of \$45,015 to each representative who voted against the bailout. In other words, legislators who voted Yes were given, on average, 65% more money than those who opposed the rescue.

### JAMES MADISON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AWARD



We are honored to receive this award from the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. The Society of Professional Journalists is dedicated to the perpetuation of a free press as the cornerstone of our nation and our liberty.

Numerous blogs and media outlets cited MAPLight.org's money and vote data in their stories about the bill's passage.

For the Senate vote on the bailout, MAPLight.org pulled together custom research at the request of CNN. Below is an excerpt of reporter David Mattingly's primetime story:

The story also aired on CNN's "Campbell Brown." As a result of these two CNN broadcasts, MAPLight.org experienced first-hand the impact that CNN has on shaping national and international news coverage. Over the next few days, the story also appeared on 21 local television news shows across the country.



News and commentary -- direct from the AC360<sup>®</sup> newsroom

#### Auto bailout: North vs. South

"CNN's David Mattingly looks [at] why some Southern senators voted against the auto bailout. It's kind of like a war between the North and the South. Senators in the South are saying no to bailout loans to carmakers up north in Detroit. Eight Senate votes from just these four Southern states could have saved the bailout. Instead, all their senators voted no..."

"A good way to illustrate how the battle lines are drawn is to follow the money.

One nonpartisan calculation by MAPLight.org shows the UAW contrib-



uted an average of \$7,400 to each yes vote it got in the Senate. Compare that to the \$147 it spent for each no vote. And that's over a period of seven years. This fight started a long time before the Big Three bailout hit the Senate floor."



MONEY AND POLITICS: ILLUMINATING THE CONNECTION

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#### INSIDE

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... and more

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