FROM THE PRESIDENT

Celebrating a decade of MapLight!

This March, MapLight celebrates a milestone: **10 years** of shining light on our broken system of money-dominated politics.

When we started, proving that special interest donations correlated to votes could take weeks of research for a single bill. We made it possible, for the first time ever, to unearth these connections with the click of a mouse—and opened a new era of unprecedented transparency and real-time accountability.

Since breaking new ground with our money and politics database in 2005, MapLight has:

- Reached 300 million people with data exposing money's influence on politics through 10,000 news stories in hundreds of outlets.
- Fielded 1,000 requests for custom money and politics data from journalists, activists, advocacy groups, and everyday citizens.
- Fueled citizen-led victories on foreclosure reform, payday lending, copyright policy, consumer protections, and more.
- Strengthened accountability campaigns on clean elections, net neutrality, fracking, the student debt crisis, and more.

Oil and gas money weighs heavily in Keystone XL debate

As Congress continued their years-long deliberation over the approval of the Keystone XL pipeline, MapLight ensured that money's influence was part of the national conversation. We revealed that:

- Senators who voted down an amendment to the bill that would have reinstated Safe Drinking Water Act protections for areas close to fracking activity received 9.7 times more money from the oil and gas industry than did senators who voted in favor ($225,687 compared to $23,258, on average).
- House members who voted to pass the Senate Keystone XL bill received 13 times more money from the oil and gas industry than did representatives who voted "no" ($45,218 compared to $3,549, on average).
- Senators who voted in favor of allowing TransCanada to build the Keystone XL pipeline without either a presidential permit or additional environmental review received 10 times more money from the oil and gas industry than did senators who voted "no" ($236,544 compared to $22,882, on average).

MapLight reveals that Citigroup’s deregulation rider was paid for by Wall Street

Buried in the 1,600-page, $1.1 trillion spending bill passed by Congress in December lay a huge boon to Wall Street banks: a policy rider, written by Citigroup lobbyists, lifting Dodd-Frank Act protections against risky custom swaps trading.

MapLight provided custom data on Wall Street’s “investments” in Congress to The New York Times for their exposé on the provision. We revealed that Bank of America, Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, and JP Morgan Chase—
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U.S. Congress contributions data provided by the Center for Responsive Politics (OpenSecrets.org) and the Federal Election Commission (FEC.gov) and legislative data provided by GovTrack.us. California contributions data provided by the National Institute on Money in State Politics (FollowThe-Money.org) and the California Secretary of State (Sos.ca.gov). Wisconsin contributions data provided by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign (WisDC.org).

Happy 10 year anniversary, MapLight!

We are incredibly proud of the unique and critical role MapLight has played in raising the national consciousness and building the political climate necessary to remedy the fundamental problem of money in politics. As one of our supporters, you should be proud, too.

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MapLight data was also spread by groups advocating against the pipeline, including 350.org, the Center for Environmental Health, the Sierra Club, Every Voice, Public Campaign, and the Democracy Initiative.

MapLight reveals that Citigroup’s deregulation rider was paid for by Wall Street

MapLight’s analysis of the money/votes correlation behind the rollback became our most-shared Facebook post of all time, reaching 46,000 people. Additionally, the data reached 2 million people through news stories in Salon, Southern California Public Radio, the Orange County Register, the Kansas City Star, the Wichita Eagle, the San Jose Mercury News, the Long Island Populist Examiner, and more.

SPOTLIGHT: New MapLight staff

Ashley Blum, Researcher, helps gather data on current legislation, tracking support and opposition for bills as they move through the legislative process. She received a B.A. with high honors in Government and minors in Russian Area Studies and Environmental Studies from Dartmouth College.

Bret Hendry, Communications Associate, leads MapLight’s social media and internship programs, supports research and distribution of editorial content, and helps build strategic partnerships with media and other groups. He received a B.A. with high honors from UC Berkeley in International Human Rights.

Leon Smith, Technical Director, oversees the implementation, configuration, and performance of MapLight’s databases, web applications, and internal IT operations. He received a B.S. in Social Science from California State Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo and an M.S. in Computer Science from California State University, Fullerton.

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How did you become involved with MapLight?
I first came across MapLight when I was a graduate student enrolled in a class on the economics of corruption. I was perusing the web in search of campaign finance data and stumbled upon MapLight’s website. I did some emailing back and forth with the research director at the time and was impressed by MapLight’s various web and data tools. I became reacquainted the following year as a Coro Fellow in public affairs. Because Coro Fellows are assigned to work on political campaigns, often in a fundraising capacity, I wanted us to learn more about money-in-politics from an expert. Our cohort spoke with a representative from MapLight, and the interview was one of the most engaging and informative that year. When Coro ended, I approached MapLight and was brought on board.

How did you become interested in the issue of money and politics?
That goes back to my academic beginnings in public policy. I’ve always been interested in laws and policies that promote better governance, and one of the most frequently recurring themes in public policy, especially in the wake of the 2010 Citizens United decision, is money’s outsized role in our political system.

Although the topic was in the back of my mind for a number of years, I didn’t appreciate its significance until my last years as a student, when I attended a lecture by Professor Lawrence Lessig. I knew that campaigns were expensive and assumed that legislators were invariably beholden to wealthy donors, but his talk really highlighted the point that the problem of money-in-politics is central to our entire legislative process. After that, it was difficult for me to dissociate government actions from some aspect of campaign contributions or lobbying or similar influence.

Describe your role at MapLight.
MapLight consists from a data perspective of many, many different tables of data, and they’re all contained within larger databases, and then all of that is backed up and accessed by our researchers, website, and tools. I make sure that all of that data is constantly updated and accurate. Part of that accuracy check is to make sure that records are being correctly parsed out and standardized and aggregated. What I have spent much of my time doing is actually making sure that differences in organization names are accounted for, noticed, and programmed such that our automated tools are able to distinguish those differences.

My work requires an understanding of rules and regulations governing various aspects of campaign finance. For example, a few months ago I spent a lot of time learning the ins and outs of California campaign finance data: committee types, filings, and contributions. Right now I’m doing the same with Federal Elections Commission data, but it’s quite complicated—one might think that a campaign contribution is a simple transfer of money from donor to candidate, but in fact there are dozens of transaction types!

What challenges does MapLight face regarding data?
We have so many great tools and the biggest challenge without a doubt is linking them together. For example, we have a great lobbying search—very powerful, very fast, very flexible. We also have a personal financial disclosures search where you can see how much stock politicians hold in different companies. Then we have our campaign contributions data along with data on bills, votes, and supporting or opposing organizations. It may sound easy to throw these data types together and offer a user experience that closely integrates them, but it’s actually very difficult to do from the database side. Our biggest data challenge right now is to integrate everything in a way that is most valuable for our users.

What opportunities do you see?
The types of data we care most about are increasingly becoming available in bulk form, which gives us the opportunity to work with more data sets and create more tools. In the past we’ve developed tools to flexibly search the California Secretary of State’s campaign contributions data as well as bulk data from the FEC. Our biggest opportunities ahead are to continue to take the lead in developing tools for other data types in the realm of campaign finance as they become available.

What about your work excites you?
I gain a surprising amount of satisfaction from cleaning and coding data, in part because I spent so much time as a researcher looking for easily usable data sets. It is not always glamorous, at all, but making bulk raw data accessible and user-friendly is incredibly important, and I enjoy doing this type of work and playing a role in addressing what I think is a critical public policy issue.

What do you wish others knew about MapLight?
I wish they knew how small we are and how much we get done with the staff size we have. We do a lot given our resources.

What developments in the field of money and politics are you excited for?
There have been many developments in open data by government entities, all of which are very exciting! For example, beginning with their 2013 filings, the members of the Senate and House can now file electronic personal financial disclosure documents. The Senate also announced in December that it will make bill and other legislative information available in bulk XML download later this year. There are all kinds of computer algorithms and machine learning processes designed to clean up campaign finance data faster than ever before as well as tools like file readers that extract data from handwritten, scanned PDF documents. These steps, both on the technology side and government side, are really going to help provide more data for the public and enable the creation of increasingly effective transparency tools.
MapLight data helps expose racial bias of money in politics system

The public policy group Demos used MapLight data in a new report dissecting the racial bias embedded in and perpetuated by our broken system of money-dominated politics.

*Stacked Deck: How the Racial Bias in Our Big Money Political System Undermines Our Democracy and Our Economy* outlines how the U.S. campaign finance system privileges a wealthy, white donor class whose big money buys competitive campaigns for their favored candidates. Under this system, candidates of color are less likely to run for or win office and raise less money when they try. Furthermore, our legislators prioritize donor class and corporate interests over the policy needs of communities of color—even though minorities’ preferences align closely with those of the general public. This bias yields a pattern of policy outcomes that devastates communities of color, from the federal program that fueled the militarized police response in Ferguson, Missouri to the deregulation that caused the subprime lending crisis.

The report also contains policy recommendations for breaking the dominance of big money and advancing racial equity, including matching small political contributions with public funds, providing tax credits for contributions from low and moderate income Americans, and fighting for sensible spending limits in the courts. To read the full Demos report, visit http://bit.ly/1yUWjxF.