Following money's influence on politics isn't easy. Let us be your guide.

OPENSECRETS.ORG
Measure of influence

Political donations by key industries in every election cycle since 1990

Methodology: Numbers are based on contributions of $200 or more from political action committees and individuals to federal candidates and from PACs, soft money and individual donors to political parties, as reported to the Federal Election Commission.
“Follow the money.”

When that phrase entered our consciousness during the Watergate era, it became an incantation for unlocking the riddle of influence in politics: follow the money, find the answers.

And whether you consider money in politics to be corrupting, or you consider it free speech, there’s no denying that it plays a critical role in influencing policies that affect all Americans’ lives. From our government’s economic and energy policies to the cost of prescription drugs and health insurance, the money that flows through Washington ultimately hits home. Through an ever more complex maze of campaign contributions, lobbying and other forms of elite influence, corporations, industry groups, labor unions and myriad organizations strive every day to skew government decisions in their favor.

To follow the money—wherever it leads—you need a guide.
Who we are

The Center for Responsive Politics is the only independent, nonprofit organization that follows all of the money spent to influence federal elections and the policies that have an impact on Americans’ lives. We’ve been putting our nonpartisan research in the hands of citizens, activists, scholars and journalists for more than 25 years.

No one else does what CRP does with the level of detail and degree of accuracy that we do it. Which is why our website, OpenSecrets.org, is the Internet’s most popular and comprehensive site devoted to federal money and U.S. politics, why the news media cite the Center thousands of times each year and why we’ve won awards and accolades from good-government, journalism and technology organizations. The Center for Responsive Politics is the reason that, when the back story of policy-making in Washington is being told, it has become routine—and, we believe, essential—to “follow the money.”

Our mission is not to eliminate money in politics, but to illuminate it. The Center for Responsive Politics has been accused of being an arm of the Left, and we’ve been accused of being tight with the Right—sometimes in the same day. The fact is we aim to ensure that all citizens receive nonpartisan information so they can reach their own conclusions about the critical issues of our day. And the truth is, money influences both sides. You need someone in the middle to count the money...if you want to make change.

What we do

When CRP started this work in the 1980s, long before the Internet, we immediately had an impact. Never before had anyone used hard data to show with such precision how dollars can distort democracy. And because our research is not funded by corporations or labor unions, but exclusively by foundations and individuals, people trust it.

Simply putting out data only goes so far toward upholding the honesty of politicians and those who seek to influence them, however. As a watchdog organization, when we smell something suspicious that the public needs to know, we bark. CRP also advocates for greater transparency from our often opaque government—as it’s often said, sunlight is the best disinfectant.

We brighten that light with the aid of technology, which today allows citizens and watchdogs to keep closer tabs on those in power than ever before.
politicians know their constituents are watching, they tend to be more responsive. In the end they know well that it’s votes, and not money, that ultimately elects them.

What we track

Some years after the Center began publishing heavy books full of campaign finance data the Internet came along, providing the ideal medium for freely sharing what we uncovered with anyone, anywhere—citizens and voters, activists and academics and, very importantly, the media. And while OpenSecrets.org remains one of the Internet’s best-kept secrets, the site received 15 million visits to view more than 140,000 pages in 2008. We set traffic records around every election, indicating that voters do use our nonpartisan information to make decisions at the polls. (Politicians: Be advised.)

There are many ways that money influences politics and public policy, and on OpenSecrets.org we monitor some of the biggest ones.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Fact of life: No one gets elected to Congress, or makes it to the White House, without a tremendous amount of money. That money might come from others or from the candidate’s own pocket; either way it’s essential. And this money—more than $5 billion in the 2008 election—often comes with expectations. To get at those expectations, it’s essential to track the source.

Using technology and considerable effort by our researchers, CRP traces this cash in a variety of ways—and in ways no one else does. In addition to following the political action committees (PACs) controlled by corporations, labor unions and other special interest groups, we closely examine the millions of individuals whose names appear in the campaign finance reports that candidates, political parties and other organizations file regularly with the Federal Election Commission. Importantly, we classify these individuals by the industry in which they work—be it banking, health care, agriculture or more than 400 other categories—and lump them together with others giving from the same organization. We also link them with their spouses and dependent children. This is one way we identify “bundles,” or groups of contributions to the same candidate from connected individuals, who may expect something in return.

Awards & Accolades

OpenSecrets.org has many fans. Here is just some of the recognition that CRP’s flagship Web site has earned over the years.

- PC World Magazine: Top 100 Useful and Interesting Sites, 2008
- Time.com: 50 Best Sites, 2007
- PC Magazine: Top 100 Classic Sites, 2006
- National Press Club: Distinguished Contribution to Online Journalism, 1999
- Featured in “300 Incredible Things to Do on the Internet,” The Nation’s “Guide to the Nation,” and Forbes “Best of the Web”
- Reprinted in numerous academic textbooks

The Center for Responsive Politics is a national treasure whose work I can always rely upon to be accurate, complete and unbiased. It’s the gold standard for factual information on campaign money.”

—MARK SHIELDS
Political Columnist; Analyst on PBS’s NewsHour

Most members of Congress are millionaires.

2001 OpenSecrets.org wins a Webby Award from the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. Three more “online Oscars” follow, in ’02, ’06 and ’07.

2007 During Stephen Colbert’s brief presidential “campaign,” CRP goes on the comedian-pundit’s show to educate him about campaign finance law. Traffic to OpenSecrets.org doubles.

2008 Redesign of OpenSecrets.org marks CRP’s 25th anniversary.

2008 Cost of presidential and congressional elections exceeds $5 billion.

2000

2002 Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act (McCain-Feingold) becomes law.
Supported by foundations, individuals and research fees, CRP operates on a lean annual budget of approximately $1.3 million. We have a long-standing policy against accepting donations from corporations, industry groups and labor unions.

These are some of the foundations that have graciously supported CRP over the years.

- Carnegie Corporation of New York
- Ford Foundation
- Joyce Foundation
- Knight Foundation
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- Omidyar Network
- Open Society Institute
- Pew Charitable Trusts
- Florence and John Schumann Foundation
- Sunlight Foundation

On OpenSecrets.org we create and display profiles of every member of Congress and every congressional race, identifying where their money has come from most recently and over time—our archive goes back more than 20 years. Every four years, we do the same for the presidential race. We profile PACs, too, to see how corporations, trade associations, labor unions and ideological groups are spreading their money around. We also slice and dice the millions of dollars that political parties raise. And we shine light on the shadowy issue groups known as 527 organizations.

In all of this research, we pay special attention to the heavy hitters of the influence game: the biggest-giving companies, unions, organizations and individuals. We try to identify what motivates them to contribute—and any payback they get.

**Lobbying and Washington’s Revolving Door**

On the other side of the coin from campaign contributions is lobbying, the money spent to hire professional advocates to influence legislation and regulations or win government contracts and earmarks. More money is spent each year on federal lobbying than on campaign contributions. Our free and easy-to-use database shows all the spenders, big and small, and which lobbyists they’ve hired back to 1998. We also identify the issues they care about and reveal what they were lobbying on.

Often the most effective, sought-after and compensated lobbyists in Washington have raised their stock by working for a time in the government itself. It’s not uncommon to see that the top lobbyists for, say, the telecommunications industry once worked at the Federal Communications Commission. Washington’s so-called Revolving Door spins the other way, too. Presidential appointees at the top of government agencies may spend a few years in public service, where they can refresh their contacts before returning to K Street, the epicenter of D.C. lobbying. OpenSecrets.org’s Revolving Door database keeps an eye on thousands of the most influential of these individuals, tracking them in and out of the public and private sectors.

**Lawmakers’ Personal Finances**

The decisions that government officials make occasionally have consequences for them personally—and may present conflicts of interest. Awarding a lucrative government contract or subsidies to a company could boost its stock. Imposing more regulations on an industry could reduce profits. OpenSecrets.org’s compilation of personal financial disclosures attempts to keep members of Congress and top executive branch officials honest by laying bare their assets and liabilities in the Internet’s only searchable database of these reports.

**Capital Eye**

CRP’s money-in-politics reporting staff translates the dollar figures and other numbers on OpenSecrets.org into articles, in-depth reports and blog entries under the “Capital Eye” label. We seek to illuminate how money influences government decision-making and connect the dots between what goes on in
Where does the data come from?

All the data we employ to produce OpenSecrets.org comes from publicly available sources. The federal government requires and collects it — we’re fortunate to live in a country that places such a value on transparency — but it’s raw information. This diagram shows where we get the data, what we do to it and who tends to use it most.

Who uses it?

Activist groups, journalists, scholars (and even politicians themselves) routinely use CRP’s data and analysis, giving it even greater reach. A sampling of this exposure:

- New York Times
- Women’s Campaign Forum
- Washington Post
- Greenpeace
- “The Colbert Report”
- DNC/RNC
- Harvard University
- CNN, Fox News, ABC News, MSNBC
- Wall Street Journal
- Huffington Post, Drudge Report
- C-SPAN
- Los Angeles Times
- Public Citizen
- Heritage Foundation
- NPR
- Club for Growth
- Center for Public Integrity

...our nation’s capital and Americans’ lives at home, at work and in their communities.

**MyOpenSecrets**

For the frequent user of OpenSecrets.org, we offer a personalization feature that lets them investigate what they want. Thousands of users have created MyOpenSecrets profiles to immediately get up to speed on candidates, elections and industries they care about, from the moment they arrive at our Web site.

**Data-sharing Tools**

We don’t want OpenSecrets.org to be the only destination for this information, which we think everyone needs to see. Despite our site’s popularity, too few Americans will stumble upon it. Instead, we provide a number of ways for experienced data-divers, as well as novices, to grab information that interests them from the site and share it with others.

[CRP’s research] has helped reporters dig up stories about corruption and undue influence on government. There have been changes in the law—abolition of soft money, change in ethics and gifts rules—and I think it’s a result of the kind of information CRP provides.”

—Jim Drinkard
Accountability Editor, Associated Press
What you’ll find on OpenSecrets.org

Capital Eye Blog: CRP’s investigators connect the dots and highlight money-in-politics news.

Action Center: Web developers can grab bulk data here and re-mix or mash it up.

Detailed Search: A site-wide search scans all of CRP’s datasets to background an industry, organization, individual or issue.

Member Profile: The site breaks down the campaign finances of every member of Congress.

Deep Analysis: Breakdowns by industry, organization and geographic area show who’s bankrolling this politician. We also reveal how the money gets spent.

Social Networking: Saving and sharing features on every page allow users to spread interesting information.

MyOpenSecrets: Users can customize their profile to watchdog what they want.

Get Local: Data particular to a state, county, metro area or ZIP code brings it all home.

Hunches That Hit the Front Page

Dan Eggen & Kimberly Kindy of The Washington Post

To uncover money-in-politics stories for The Washington Post, Dan Eggen likes to troll OpenSecrets.org for leads. So he and colleague Kimberly Kindy used Center for Responsive Politics data in a July 2009 front-page story revealing that nation’s largest insurers, hospitals and medical groups had hired 350 former members of Congress and government staffers to lobby their old bosses and colleagues. Such a special interest spending spree came at a time when Congress found itself deep in debate over how to reform the nation’s health care insurance system.

Examining Big Oil’s Pipeline to Washington

Oil Change International

In the view of Oil Change International, the U.S. will remain largely dependent on oil as long as American politicians are dependent on the industry’s campaign contributions.

To illustrate lawmakers’ ties to Big Oil, the nonprofit advocacy group, which aims to dismantle the political barriers that hinder the world’s transition to clean energy, uses data from CRP to power a searchable database on its website: PriceofOil.org. Visitors can learn how much their elected officials have received in contributions from the oil and gas industry over the last 20 years the site’s users have sent as many as 65,000 mailings to Congress in a year. In the 2008 election cycle, incumbents raised at least $17.5 million from oil and gas companies, more than any other prior cycle.
The future

Back when we still published our campaign finance research on paper, we had no idea how many people we’d eventually reach once the Internet came along. The effect thanks to technology has been profound. Nearly every day, you see data from OpenSecrets.org reported on television or in a major newspaper. Activists for a wide range of social causes use our statistics to add evidence to their advocacy. Even candidates for office now routinely cite our figures in their advertising. And, perhaps most importantly, the site has become a popular tool for voters when they’re researching the choices on the ballot.

What else can technology make possible, we wonder. If giant books were OpenSecrets 1.0 and the Web site was 2.0, what will 3.0 look like?

As we envision it, the next stage in the continuing evolution of the Center for Responsive Politics involves unlocking the vast internal databases that power OpenSecrets.org and sharing the information we work so hard to create with individuals and organizations that can do even more with it. The secrets will continue to come from our Web site, but we want to enlist, educate and inspire others to help us tell them.

We call it OpenSecrets OpenData.

For those individuals and organizations that want direct, automatic access to more data than we already display on OpenSecrets.org, we’re offering a number of powerful tools. We want groups that advocate on policy—health care, the environment, education, consumer safety, taxes, you name it—to use these tools to show their audiences how money influences those issues.

At the same time we’re putting our data in others’ hands, we’ll continue to improve the Internet’s best Web site devoted to money’s role in politics and policy. We’ll be adding more context and meaning to the numbers we publish on OpenSecrets.org, and we’ll empower citizens with tools to demand accountability.

The Center has always been about transparency and a responsive government, but we’ve stepped up our advocacy for a more transparent and responsive government. We feel the environment has never been better for getting Washington to open up its inner-workings to its citizens. This will help restore much-needed trust and make us all feel a little more comfortable about having the most expensive election and policy-making process in the world.

The Center is endeavoring to reach people where they already are, such as popular social networking Web sites. And it’s working: Individuals subscribing to OpenSecrets.org’s Facebook page and Twitter feeds continue to double every few months. The Center in July of 2009 also conducted the first of many live Web chats that connect top staff members and writers directly with interested parties.

Our plans are ambitious, and they require a significant investment of talent, passion and, of course, money. That investment, though, is insignificant when compared to the public value we predict these efforts will return.

And that investment is tiny compared to the great cost to democracy and open government that losing a resource like OpenSecrets.org would entail.

### Downloadable bulk data
We’ve made available 200 million records going back 20 years, so that activists, investigative journalists, political scientists and other data-divers can hunt around for good stories by downloading reams of data directly from our systems. We provide the haystack. They look for the needle.

### APIs (Advanced Programming Interfaces)
Advocacy groups, other nonprofits and news organizations can plug into OpenSecrets data and display it on their own Web pages, and it updates in real time when we update our databases. Using our APIs, Web developers are mashing up our information with other data sets on their sites, connecting the dots in ways that have never before been possible.

### Widgets
These easy-to-use online tools are designed for anyone with a Web site or blog to display CRP data that they select—for example, a congressional race they’re watching or an industry of interest. When we update the data on our end, the widgets automatically refresh.

### Heavy Hitters
Top All-Time Campaign Donors, 1989-2008

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Dem %</th>
<th>Repub %</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 AT&amp;T Inc</td>
<td>$42,291,235</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 American Fedn of State, County &amp; Municipal Employees</td>
<td>$40,710,273</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 National Assn of Realtors</td>
<td>$34,635,003</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Goldman Sachs</td>
<td>$30,954,384</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 American Assn for Justice</td>
<td>$30,107,429</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Intl Brotherhood of Electrical Workers</td>
<td>$29,693,266</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 National Education Assn</td>
<td>$29,658,375</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Laborers Union</td>
<td>$27,855,600</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Service Employees International Union</td>
<td>$27,380,407</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Carpenters &amp; Joiners Union</td>
<td>$26,798,258</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FACT
Will you help us continue to expose how special interests influence policy?

To Support the Center

If you believe as we do that the influence of money on U.S. politics and policy is an uncomfortable reality that should not be kept secret, please support the Center for Responsive Politics. Your contribution will help us to:

- Maintain and constantly improve OpenSecrets.org
- Remain independent
- Continue processing and analyzing millions of money-in-politics data records
- Stay current with ever-changing technology and improve efficiency
- Secure sufficient bandwidth to accommodate public interest in the site
- Hire, train and retain talented and dedicated staff
- Highlight our findings through media outreach, as well as high-impact reports, our blog and other social networking tools
- Hold politicians accountable to the people they represent, not the interests that fund them

Don’t think that money-and-politics has to be your cause. Keeping government transparent, accountable and responsive is a cause that everyone, of every political persuasion, should be able to get behind. If you care most about the environment or health care, energy policy or the economy, supporting CRP will have an impact on those issues—and on so many more.

Individuals* can make contributions online at OpenSecrets.org or by mail. Foundations interested in supporting the Center’s work should contact our executive director:

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Phone: (202) 857-0044
Fax: (202) 857-7809
E-mail: skrumholz@crp.org

The Center for Responsive Politics is a calm island of information in a boiling sea of contention about the role of money in politics. The contention is about how much, if at all, political money should be regulated. Because most of the money funds advocacy—speech—the stakes could not be higher."

—George F. Will • ABC News
Commentator & Syndicated Columnist

Transparency isn’t just a buzzword—it is the greatest protection we as citizens have against those trying to game the system. And CRP, in shining a nonpartisan spotlight on the profound impact money has on our democracy, plays a vital role in allowing us to hold accountable those with their hands on the levers of power.”

—Arianna Huffington • Founder, The Huffington Post

*We have a long-standing policy against accepting donations from corporations, industry groups and labor unions.
Total spending by presidential candidates

Source: Federal Election Commission. Numbers are not adjusted for inflation.