

Expensive appetites



Site dishes out data on money in politics

Some websites are like candy. They're sweet to visit, but they don't have a lot of nutritional value. Other websites are like spinach. You visit them because they're good for you, but you don't really have a good time while you're there.



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InSites

Opensecrets.org is like spinach. It's packed with loads of nutritional information relating to money in politics, but most people aren't going to enjoy the time they spend there. Of course, some people like spinach. And if you like poring over lots of detailed financial reports, you will like Open Secrets.

To be fair, there's more to the site than just financial reports. Most of the articles examining money in politics start out with good explanations of what is going on, why it's important and what the impacts may be. Then they delve into who's putting money into the issue, how much is being spent and who is getting the money. The site examines election financing, lobbying, super PACs, dark money, advertising and more. There are articles covering topics that are not on the surface about money, such as gun control or marijuana legalization. But even the topics that are not strictly financial are examined through the lens of their financing, because money greases the wheels of government. This year the cost of the

mid-term elections is projected to be more than \$7 billion. That's a lot of grease.

For reporters, academics or anyone who is interested in doing a deep dive to follow the money in politics, the site is an invaluable resource. There are numerous reports and charts detailing the flow of cash on both the federal and state level. You can look up specific officeholders to see which industries and issue advocates give them money, and how much. The charts show you at a glance which parties are supported by different industries. For instance, healthcare and labor overwhelmingly support Democrats, while energy and defense favor Republicans. Some industries, such as finance and business, hedge their bets and give nearly equal amounts to both parties.

In addition to industries, there are organizations that funnel lots of cash to politicians. The names of these organizations — Blackstone Group, Citadel or Oracle —

don't always make their agenda clear. But when you see where the money goes it becomes clear where their influence goes, left, right or playing both sides. A lot of money is given in support of specific issues. The site has profiles explaining various issues and who the interested parties are. Often the people opposing issues are those that will suffer financially if the advocates succeed. For instance, the fossil fuel industry will suffer as greener energy alternatives grow.

The site is also useful to the typical voter who doesn't have time to parse the intricate finances of an election. If you just want answers on your candidate or the opposition, you can quickly find what you're looking for. Under the Elections & Fundraising Data link, you can look up the candidates you are interested in and see how much money they are raising and spending, and where it comes from. This can shed light on their priorities. For instance, in the race for the open

U.S. Senate seat in Pennsylvania, you can compare the total amounts for John Fetterman (D) and Mehmet Oz (R). A chart breaks down contributions from small donors, large individual contributions, PAC contributions and self-financing. Fetterman is almost exclusively financed by individual donors, while Oz is mostly self-financed. There are a series of links above the chart that allows you to see top contributors and industries that support each candidate.

The website is well designed with easy navigation, solid typography and good use of color, pictures and graphics. It promotes itself as nonpartisan, independent and nonprofit. There are prompts throughout the site that allow you to donate to support its mission. If you are hungry for information on money in politics, this site will satisfy your appetite.

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