

Learning about Legislation #8 - The Best Congress Money Can Buy: Tracking Donations to our MoCs

If you haven't read the Washington Post/60 Minutes collaboration from last Sunday about how the last Congress passed a bill that thwarted the DEA's ability to combat the opioid crisis, you really should - it is a masterful piece of investigative journalism. I know it has been cited a lot in this week's report, but the ripples from this are spreading out across all of Washington right now. One of the many revelations in that article was just how much money a small number of pharmaceutical warehousing/distribution corporations spent on our Congresspeople in support of this legislation. From [the article](#):

"Political action committees representing the industry contributed at least \$1.5 million to the 23 lawmakers who sponsored or co-sponsored four versions of the bill, including nearly \$100,000 to Marino and \$177,000 to Hatch. Overall, the drug industry spent **\$102 million lobbying Congress on the bill** and other legislation between 2014 and 2016, according to lobbying reports."

With those kinds of expenditures getting tossed around out there, it is important to know who is spending money on our own Members of Congress so that we can use a critical eye when we review the legislation that they are sponsoring. Below, I've shared the websites I use to research information about the campaign donations to our MoCs.

The Federal Election Commission - <https://www.fec.gov/>

This is the government's official portal for tracking and reporting campaign donations. It contains a lot of useful and educational articles on campaign finance laws and regulations. It lets you search by candidates, the official committees for each candidate, individual contributions and political action committees. It allows you to export the data you have searched to Excel spreadsheets, so that you can sort and filter it as you please. If, however, you like to look at infographics or other charts to absorb information, this site can be lacking.

Open Secrets - <https://www.opensecrets.org/>

This website uses/provides much the same information as the FEC site, but it has some added features. It allows you to view donations by industry. It also has a much more user-friendly interface. For example, after typing in my MoC's name, it only took me three mouse-clicks to get to the list of 312 "Ideological/Single Issue" PACs who contributed funds to him. (Who would have thought that Brian Fitzpatrick would have received \$2,000 from the Texas Republicans United PAC for the 2018 race?) It also has a list of legislation the MoC has sponsored along with a link to the organizations who are lobbying that issue. Like the FEC site, you can download your search results into Excel for data sorting.

Follow the Money - <https://www.followthemoney.org/>

This site uses a bit more in the infographics department, for those who like to view data that way. It offers many of the same features as Open Secrets - donations by industry, lists of donors, etc. However, I have found that their information about sponsored legislation is not as up to date as Open Secrets.

I hope you find these sites useful!

Are there questions that you have about how Congress works, about elections, about voting... or anything to do with government processes? I am looking for topics for future "Learning about Legislation" topics, so please - email me your questions at KierstynPZ@gmail.com - I can't promise that I already know the answer, but I will research the issue and share my findings with our readers in a future segment.