ABSTRACT

It is expensive to get elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, and in the past several decades the increase in spending has been very steep. In 2012, candidates spent an average of nearly $1.2 million (Ornstein, et al 2013). However, that includes only direct candidate or party expenditures, and does not included money spent by outside (i.e., "independent") groups. Lessig (2011) argues that the way campaigns are funded, and the dependence members of Congress have on a relatively small number of donors is a form of corruption in our political system. This thesis produces an interactive web map showing the geographic distribution of campaign contributions and independent expenditures made for members of the U.S. House of Representatives. Campaign finance data are most commonly displayed in tables and graphs. They are useful and important for those seeking to investigate the details of campaigns or needing to answer specific question, but a map is more accessible and engaging for the general public. There are numerous other visualizations available on the internet, but many have not been updated since 2012 election cycle (or earlier), or may not include all sources of spending. The web map created as a part of this thesis enables a user to select a candidate and view contributions summed by zip code using graduated symbols. The geographic origin of contributions is apparent, whether within or outside the district. A user can also search for groups that made independent expenditures and see the congressional districts where money was spent. An evaluation of the web map by a small sample of people showed the effectiveness of visualizing campaign finance data to better inform the public about money used in elections.