

# **Campaign Money on the Information Superhighway:**

**Electronic Filing and Disclosure  
of Campaign Finance Reports**

**By Craig B. Holman, Ph.D. and Robert Stern  
Center for Governmental Studies**

*“The irony is that all the campaigns use computers, and then they translate it to hardcopy and then they give it to us [to enter into our computer data base].”*

— *Miles Rapoport*  
*Connecticut Secretary of State*<sup>1</sup>

It has often been said that technology has a life of its own. This observation certainly rings true in the field of electronic filing and disclosure of campaign finance reports. After decades of little change in the way candidates and political committees disclosed their finances through paper records, the last few years alone have ushered in a revolution in how candidates and committees file their reports and how state agencies disclose these reports to the public. This revolution has been technologically driven in the form of electronic filing and disclosure. “Virtual” campaign finance data base technology is changing so rapidly that any accurate survey of state activities in this field must be continuously updated.

Campaign finance disclosure has traveled a long and slow road in most states. Originally stored as *paper* documents in filing cabinets, *automation* of campaign finance data became an exciting new procedure in campaign finance disclosure as early as 1976 when Wisconsin utilized computers to store campaign records. In more recent years, however, **many states have moved away from manually feeding campaign finance data into their computers and toward systems of *electronic* filing.** In an electronic system, the information is digitized by the campaign committees themselves and transferred in electronic format via either diskette or modem to the centralized computer data base.

The movement to digitize is so rapid that each state has approached the new filing and disclosure technology with different objectives, with different software and operating systems, and at different costs. This study surveys the states and selected local jurisdictions on the evolution of campaign filing and disclosure systems. Its findings are drawn from a 1995-1996 telephone survey of elections officials in every state. The survey investigates the extent to which jurisdictions have developed or are planning to develop automated or electronic reporting systems as well as the

operations and costs of these systems. The experience of three jurisdictions is scrutinized in greater detail.

The report below is based on survey findings in the 1995-1996 period and, consequently, may be outdated in some respects today. For comparison purposes, the study concludes with an updated chart of federal, state, local and Canadian activities of electronic filing and disclosure of campaign finance data as of August 2000.

Also included is “The Peter Ratings” chart, an assessment of the quality of governmental Web sites designed to disclose campaign finance data to the public. Designed by Peter Kim of the Center for Governmental Studies, this ratings chart provides the opinions of Peter of what is good and what is not-so-good about each of the rated Web sites, followed by a grading of each site from best to worst. “The Peter Ratings” constitute a subjective assessment of Web sites from a person who is not a professional in the field of campaign finance—although a fine person indeed—and thus attempt to reveal how the general public may view these sites. Peter’s assessments are current as of August 2000 as well.

#### **A. From Paper to Bytes: Campaign Finance Reporting Is Moving Into the 21st Century**

The traditional method of filing, storing and disclosing campaign finance records has been through paper recordkeeping. Some states, such as Maryland, continue to maintain campaign finance records in paper form. A review of filing and disclosing procedures in Maryland highlight a few of the many problems involved in paper recordkeeping. First of all, compiling, filing and maintaining paper documents is time-consuming and requires a sizable staff. Considerable storage space is needed to keep current records and to archive old records. Preserving the integrity of the documents can be difficult when they are continually handed out for public review. The data is not easily accessible to the public and, in order to be analyzed, must be photocopied and reentered into a computer data base—a very time-consuming process that usually will date any meaningful analysis. Finally, Maryland elections officials frequently encounter problems in monitoring and enforcing violations of campaign finance laws because of the slowness and clumsiness of tracing contributions and expenditures from paper reports.<sup>2</sup>

For two decades, government agencies responsible for administering and enforcing campaign finance laws across the nation have struggled to fulfill their mandates. **Submerged in paper flows and paralyzed by legislative inertia, many agencies lobbied for funds that would allow them to automate.** As it became clear that funding would not be

forthcoming and that the agencies could not satisfy the public's demand for intelligible campaign finance information, private watchdog organizations emerged to plow through the tons of filings and make sense of the data.

Campaign personnel in many states successfully urged candidates and political committees to automate their campaign finance data. Thus, most major campaigns turned to in-house or off-the-shelf campaign management computer software. Having turned to electronic filekeeping, campaign treasurers were now faced with the incongruity of re-entering every record by hand onto state-required disclosure forms after having entered the same data into their campaign management computer program.

Some states started automating their filings. In a paper filing system, they had to file the documents and retrieve them by hand for public viewing upon request. In an automated system, elections officials would manually enter the documents into their computer data bases where, despite the time and expense of keying in the documents, the records would be stored and retrieved in a much more convenient manner for the public.

By "computerizing" the information submitted by candidates and political action committees (PACs), these agencies could generate summary reports with some ease and provide the public with tolerably decipherable data. But data entry in an automated system still had to be keyed or scanned into the computers manually from paper filings and was expensive and time-consuming. The Texas State Ethics Commission took so much time entering then-Governor Ann Richards' 65,000 records onto its data base, for example, that she had lost the race before the task was completed.

The growth in campaign filing technology, however, caused pressure for a new era of electronic filing. **New filing software that could combine campaign management features with the ability to produce acceptable disclosure forms not only saves time but reduces the risks of filing errors.** Not surprisingly, campaign personnel have played a significant role in assisting states in the development of electronic filing software.

Even though campaign committees have increasingly relied on computer technology in recent years, state agencies charged with "storing information" were doing very little to utilize the new technologies and, as filing cabinets overflowed with paper, were aptly characterized as "leaning towers of political pulp."<sup>3</sup> After the debacle with Governor Richards, Texas developed its own electronic filing program. It made no sense that the state would expend resources re-entering data that (1) already had been entered onto the candidate's computer and (2) was untimely and, therefore, hardly useful. The obvious next step, which Texas began to pursue, was to supply

candidates and PACs with some means of transferring the data electronically. By 1993-1994, Florida, Michigan, Ohio and New Mexico followed suit and started experimenting with their own systems of electronic filing.

The most recent phase of electronic filing and disclosure has emerged only a few years ago, but it is spreading rapidly. It is aimed not only at minimizing redundant work but also at attracting technologically sophisticated campaigns. New technology has made possible "electronic reporting," that is, the electronic transfer of data between candidates and agencies and between agencies and the public. The advances brought by the new technology provide agencies with an efficient and effective means of sorting, auditing and retrieving campaign finance information, offer the public virtually immediate access to the data, in both raw and summary formats, and enable campaigns to ensure error-free reporting along with performing other campaign management functions.

The sudden popularity of electronic filing and disclosure is largely based on four distinct advantages:

- For campaign treasurers, electronic filing simplifies recordkeeping and helps ensure accuracy and avoid mistakes;
- For campaign managers, electronic recordkeeping provides for convenient analysis of sources of support and campaign contributions;
- For elections officers, electronic filing permits fast and thorough auditing of campaign records; and
- For the public, electronic disclosure makes election contribution and spending patterns readily accessible.

## **B. States Are Experimenting with Different Methods of Electronic Reporting**

Only five states have fully operational electronic reporting systems: Florida, Kentucky, New Mexico, Ohio and Texas.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the vast majority of states, most of which store at least some of their campaign finance data in an electronic format, find themselves somewhere between exploration and testing. Several states indicate varying degrees of interest in using reporting technology, especially if the software is affordable. Colorado and West Virginia are subject to unfunded mandates by their legislatures to develop electronic filing systems. New Jersey has spent \$20,000 on one feasibility study and has requested \$80,000 for another feasibility study.

**Only four states in 1995-1996 show no inclination to automate campaign finance data.** In Utah, political resistance to any form of campaign finance reform in general is too high. In Nevada, South Dakota and Georgia, electronic reporting is viewed by state elections officials as not feasible.<sup>5</sup>

On the filing side of an electronic reporting system in 1995-1996, 20 states and three municipalities have some form of electronic filing program either pending or in place. Five more states are studying how to develop systems for electronic filing of campaign finance records. And elections officials in 18 other states have indicated serious consideration and interest in developing such programs. Of the states with electronic filing systems active or pending, 11 states will permit candidates to file by diskette, while only two—Iowa and New Mexico—presently, or will soon, permit off-site electronic filing via modem. The remainder of states actively pursuing a system of electronic filing and disclosure are still studying how and when to implement such a system.

Elections officials in several states have expressed some concern about permitting candidates to file their campaign finance statements by modem. On-line communications can sometimes be intercepted or sent from unauthorized persons, raising fears that the files conceivably could be tampered with or falsified. Both Iowa and New Mexico have addressed this possibility by requiring candidates who file by modem to use an encrypted signature program.

**In addition to activity at the state level, three major cities as of 1995-1996—New York, San Francisco and Seattle—have functioning electronic reporting systems.** New York City, in fact, is credited as having been among the earliest jurisdictions in the nation to turn to electronic disclosure of campaign finance statements.

Although some states with small populations and limited financial resources are contemplating electronic filing and disclosure, it could be years before many local jurisdictions invest in such systems, especially in medium-sized and small-sized municipalities. Most local jurisdictions simply lack the technology and financial resources to explore developing computerized record systems; they may wait for others to pioneer this field.

Once data has been converted into an electronic format, elections agencies have the discretion to provide the public with a number of ways to access the data. Electronic disclosure takes the form of public access either through an in-house terminal, diskette, public kiosk, modem or an on-line Internet site. While an in-house terminal is clearly the most popular method of disseminating campaign finance information to the public and the press in

1995-1996, many states choose more than one medium. Kansas, for example, makes its digital campaign finance records available through in-house terminals, computer diskettes, public kiosks and direct on-line modem connections. Texas makes its records available through diskettes, a direct modem connection and an Internet bulletin board.

In-house terminals have the advantages of being easy to set up, even for those agencies with limited knowledge of computer technology, while providing elections officials with some control over who can access the data base and when. In New York City, for example, campaign finance records are only available through in-house terminals during office hours. Preference for use of these terminals is granted to staff at the elections agency and the press, although others may request the privilege.

Of course, the control of information offered by in-house terminals can also be seen as a serious drawback. One of the primary reasons behind electronic disclosure is to enhance public accessibility to the information. **Direct modem connections, public kiosks and, most importantly, public Internet sites allow for a much wider dissemination of election information than in-house terminals.** These methods of electronic disclosure, however, require somewhat greater familiarity with the operations of cyberspace and will usually cost more to set-up and to maintain than in-house systems. Nevertheless, public access through Internet Web pages is becoming increasingly attractive to many elections agencies. Due to its interactive nature, a Web page has the capacity to offer the public a multitude of government information and services.<sup>6</sup> Three jurisdictions—California, Florida and Seattle—provide Web page access to campaign finance records in 1995-1996 and 10 more jurisdictions are in the process of developing Web pages.<sup>7</sup>

In each state the information that can be accessed depends on what information has been entered into the computer data base. Thirteen states report that they only enter limited amounts of data.<sup>8</sup> Some elections agencies maintain little more than reporting deadlines on their computers; others enter summary totals and, on occasion, contribution information for selected races only.

In New Jersey, for example, the state Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC) has a mainframe computer but very little campaign finance data is in a useful electronic format and made accessible to the public. Consequently, a grass-roots campaign finance reform group has had to spend 20 months combing through reams of paper campaign finance reports and type the material into its own micro-computer data base in order to discern contribution and spending patterns in the state's 1993 legislative campaigns.

ELEC Director Frederick Hermann has noted that the vast amount of campaign finance records filed with the state require a modern computerized system to handle it. "There is technology than can [manage the records]. But it is the question of getting the funding," said Hermann.<sup>9</sup>

Of those states with active and more complete data banks, nine provide the public with access via in-house terminals,<sup>10</sup> six states permit direct dial-in using remote access software,<sup>11</sup> and four have functional Internet sites (either Web pages, bulletin board systems or Gopher sites).<sup>12</sup> One state—Kansas—permits access through electronic kiosks set up at local libraries.

These numbers will change rapidly. They do not include those agencies that have received funding and either are under contract or have written detailed proposals and bid requests. They also do not reflect the tentative findings of states conducting investigations or the preferences of states either initiating investigations or expressing strong interest in developing reporting software.

The numbers also will change because **the market for supplying states with software is untapped and private vendors are positioning themselves to take advantage of the potential demand.** One private vendor, SDR Technologies, Inc., a California-based campaign software company, provided both San Francisco and Seattle with reporting software at no cost in exchange for the two cities' exclusive use of its software in testing sites. Oklahoma, a state that has allocated funding to develop an electronic reporting program, is negotiating with SDR Technologies. Arizona, Connecticut, and Montana are under contract with other private vendors. Iowa has received foundation money to develop its own reporting software.

### **C. Mandatory Electronic Filing and Disclosure Is On the Rise**

Electronic filing and disclosure procedures vary significantly from state to state. Several states request candidates to participate voluntarily in the electronic filing program. Some states require the elections agency to provide for electronic filing, but permit the agency to determine whether electronic filing is voluntary or mandatory. Some states mandate electronic filing for specified races; others mandate electronic filing for any campaign that reaches a specified threshold of receipts or expenditures.

In 1995-1996, voluntary programs have been adopted by legislatures in Colorado, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas and Washington, and by city councils in New York City and Seattle. The results, although inconclusive, are mixed. Only nine candidates filed electronically in New Mexico's last

election. In Texas, only 28 out of over 1,000 candidates filed electronically. In contrast, half of the one hundred candidates who ran for office in New York City in the last election submitted their reports electronically; forty-four candidates used the city's software and six candidates on their own in-house programs.

The success of the voluntary program in New York City is not altogether unexpected. One major reason for its use by candidates is the public matching funds program. Candidates who file electronically, which means submitting their data to the elections agency on diskette (hard copy duplicates are required), receive their checks more quickly than do candidates who file paper forms.

Three states permit the receiving agency, usually either the secretary of state or the state board of elections, to determine whether or not electronic filing is mandatory. The Ohio Secretary of State may require candidates to file electronically, although it does not at the moment. In Florida and Oklahoma, state boards of elections are currently developing mandatory electronic filing regulations. At the local level, San Francisco adopted an ordinance that required candidates that receive or spend more than \$5,000 to file electronically.

Three states—Hawaii, Kentucky and Missouri—have passed legislation that requires or will require (when the system is operational) candidates in specified races, such as the gubernatorial contest, to file their campaign finance reports electronically.<sup>13</sup> In Arizona, legislation mandating electronic filing is presently under consideration. In Connecticut and California, initial legislative attempts to require electronic filing have failed, but these set-backs may be reversed. In 1996, a legislative report in Connecticut has recommended not only that all state candidates and committees who raise or spend more than \$30,000 be required to file electronically by 1999, but that they should even be required to file by modem. Similarly, **a recent report in California issued by the Secretary of State proposes *phasing in mandatory filing in that state.***<sup>14</sup> The California report recommends that a voluntary pilot program be initiated during the 1996 election cycle for filers of campaign statements. A mandatory pilot program for statewide candidates and ballot measure committees raising \$100,000 or more in contributions would begin in 1997 and continue through the 1998 elections. Finally, all state candidates and committees raising \$30,000 or more in contributions would be required to file electronically beginning in 1999. This proposal has been rejected by the California Legislature in the 1996 session, but plans are already underway to revise and re-introduce the measure next year.

Voluntary programs of electronically filing are regularly viewed as a transitional stage into a new era of campaign finance disclosure. Uncertainty with the technology of electronic recordkeeping as well as fear of its potential costs have discouraged most states from leaping into a full-scale mandatory system of “virtual” campaign finance reporting. But as the new filing and disclosure systems begin to prove themselves in the public eye, it is reasonable to expect more and more states to establish prudent requirements for candidates and committees to participate.

#### **D. Trials and Tribulations: Three Selected Jurisdictions Have Had Different Experiences with Electronic Reporting**

Every state’s experience with electronic reporting has been different. Some states have developed or are developing their own software. Other states have experimented with their own programs before turning to vendors. Still other states have sought out private vendors to develop programs.

Many states have run into difficulties. Connecticut, for example, is in litigation with its vendor. Oregon has paid \$35,000 for the development of software that was incompatible with its existing Wang mainframe. Florida, frustrated by the demands of technical support after issuing its state-developed software, has turned to the private sector to produce software compatible with the state’s mandatory filing format.

Appendix B describes these experiences in some detail. Three cases are worth exploring in particular, because the strategies employed reflect the broad variety of alternative approaches to electronic reporting.

##### ***1. New York City: A Fully Operational Voluntary Program***

The New York City Campaign Finance Board was one of the first electoral jurisdictions to implement electronic reporting.<sup>15</sup> In 1989, the Board developed a mainframe database system called the “Campaign Finance Information System” (CFIS) for \$500,000. For the following three years, computer operators manually keyed in campaign finance reports. By 1991, in order to prevent errors, the Board developed a “key verification” system. All data were entered twice by different operators. The procedure was so time-consuming and rigorous that the Board explored the possibility of uploading data electronically. Meanwhile, candidates began to request some means by which they could file their disclosure statements electronically. In 1992, a team of Board employees worked together with private consultants to develop an electronic filing program. They called the program C-SMART (“Candidate Software for Managing and Reporting Transactions”). A prototype was made available in 1993; and in 1994, almost half of all local candidates filed their

reports using it. The software cost \$60,000 to develop. **Within two years, the software paid for itself in data entry savings alone.**

C-SMART software contains several noteworthy features. It is written in a format that is compatible with other campaign management software, permitting candidates to upload names and addresses of contributors onto mailing lists. It produces hard copies that are acceptable to the city Board of Elections, a separate agency to which candidates must also submit disclosure forms. The program contains a built-in help facility. It flags over-the-limit contributions, missing information, and invalid matching claims. It calculates matching funds. It cross-references forms and contributor data so that contributors only have to be entered once. Finally, it keeps aggregate totals and prints contributor lists, expenditure reports and intermediary (bundling) reports. The Board is considering adding additional features, including mailing lists/labels, text files for generating thank-you letters to contributors, and routines for tracking pledges and generating checks.

One problem that soon surfaced was the compatibility of CFIS with the candidates' in-house programs. Initially, the Board required candidates to conform their program precisely to C-SMART's IBM-DOS format. Candidates submitted sample diskettes that had to be approved by the Board. Delays led to disbursement problems and eventually the Board issued software enabling campaigns to submit acceptable hard copies without manually filling out forms. Compatibility problems notwithstanding, in 1994, 95% of the data received electronically came from campaigns using their own in-house programs.

Electronic filing made it possible for the Board to issue *ad hoc* reports rapidly and provide virtually immediate public access to campaign finance data. These reports included contributions sorted by contributor name, contribution amount and employer name, and expenditures sorted by payee name. In addition to *ad hoc* reports, the Board developed ACCESS (the Automated Candidate Contribution and Expenditure Search System). Relied on primarily by the press, ACCESS allows Board staff members to conduct searches of the entire CFIS database for contributors, vendors, lenders, or bundlers. The Board also maintains an on-site terminal that provides direct access to the Federal Election Commission data base in Washington, DC.

## **2. *The State of Iowa: A Privately Funded Program Nears Completion***

Although still to be implemented, Iowa's electronic reporting system is unique in several respects.<sup>16</sup> It is the product of a collaborative effort by the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board, private foundations and Iowa

State University. After Executive Director Kay Williams of the ethics board revealed to Professor Jack Whitmer that the agency was 40 months behind schedule in auditing campaign finance reports, they began to investigate enhancing automation of the agency. With grants from the Joyce and Schumann Foundations and the support of the university, Professor Whitmer pulled together a team of graduate student programmers to develop what is called the Iowa Campaign Finance Reporting System.

The system combines a relational data base management system programmed in Oracle and campaign management software programmed in FoxPro. The government-side software contains a bulletin board system that will display all electronically filed reports, initially allowing simultaneous use by up to four people.<sup>17</sup> The filer-side software includes communications software, compression software and encoding software. In addition to allowing candidates and PACs to file campaign finance reports electronically, the software enables users to import data files from voter registration computer records, prepare address labels, record financial and other contributions, prepare bank deposit slips, and perform pre-filing error-checking routines. The filing software will function on MS-DOS, Windows, and MAC-OS. The total cost for the project will be approximately \$350,000 and maintenance of the state's system is expected to run about \$30,000 a year.

Unlike New York City's program, **the Iowa program permits candidates to file via modem using an encrypted signature.** (Currently, only New Mexico has the ability to receive reports on-line.) The Iowa filing program uses a secure "file packaging routine" that numbers packages of transmitted data in order to verify reception of each transaction over the modem lines by the agency. Further verification is obtained by checking the signature of the filer. The filer inputs an identification number and a filing number and then places a "filing disk" into the computer, which contains an electronic facsimile of the candidate's (or appropriate officer's) signature, a copy of which is retained at the agency. The filing program encrypts the report and places the digitized signature on the report. The agency's receiving program confirms that the signature is valid and sends a message to the file indicating filing time, date, and begin- and end-transaction numbers of the report filed.

Iowa's program is unique in one final respect. It has been developed with the awareness that campaign finance laws constantly change. Therefore, the program can be adapted to changes in Iowa's campaign finance laws and, ostensibly, to other state or local campaign finance operations. Once

developed and proven, this software could be the key to jurisdictions that would not otherwise develop electronic reporting capabilities.

### ***3. The State of California: A Bipartisan Study Charts A Course for Electronic Reporting But Is Blocked by the Legislature***

California prides itself on its computer industry. Yet, the Political Reform Division at the Secretary of State's office, the state repository for campaign finance reports, is one of the least automated elections agencies in the country. Several efforts have been made since the early-1990s to bring the agency "out of the back woods and into the space age."<sup>18</sup> Then-Secretary of State Tony Miller requested funds in 1993 to initiate a study. At that time, the funding was not provided. State Senator Tom Hayden (D-Santa Monica) submitted two bills on electronic reporting in the same period. The first bill failed. The second bill (SB 68), which mandated electronic filing for candidates who received or spent more than \$30,000 and appropriated \$50,000 to develop the software, was tabled after the administration's Department of Finance estimated start-up costs at \$1 million and opposed the bill as "premature."

At the same time Senator Hayden introduced his legislation, Assembly Member Jackie Speier (D-Burlingame) wrote AB 3575 which called for the establishment of an expert panel to study electronic filing and to issue a final report by January 1, 1996. Creation of the study panel was approved by the legislature and Secretary of State Bill Jones convened an Electronic Filing Advisory Panel (EFAP) that met throughout 1995. The advisory panel submitted its findings to the Secretary of State in December as a legislative proposal.

On February 22, 1996, the panel's report was introduced to the California State Legislature by Democratic Assembly Member Jackie Speier and endorsed by the Republican Secretary of State Jones. AB 2546 would have required all state level candidates with receipts or expenditures of \$30,000 or more per calendar year, and all state lobbying entities, to file the required financial disclosure reports electronically by the year 2000. The bill would have further mandated that the filings be made immediately accessible on the Internet after transmittal to the Secretary of State's office.

The bill called for establishing a phased-in electronic filing program for all state candidates, campaign committees and lobbyists. It would have required electronic filing for all statewide candidates and ballot measure committees raising \$100,000 or more beginning in the 1997-1998 election cycle. All state candidates and committees, including legislative candidates, raising or spending \$30,000 or more after January 1, 1999 would then be

required to file electronically. Lobbyists would be permitted to file electronically if they chose to do so in the 1997-1998 election cycle; electronic filing for lobbyists would become mandatory in the 1999-2000 election cycle.

Both filer-side and government-side software were expected to be developed in time to permit interested candidates to participate in a voluntary program if the legislation were enacted. It would have been distributed by the Secretary of State's office. The basic filing software would be provided at no cost by the state for both DOS-based and MAC-based platforms. Its functions would include a help feature and spreadsheet features that allow for simple calculations and sorting. The Secretary of State would determine the format so that local governments and private vendors could conform their campaign management software to the state's format and offer candidates more attractive packages.

**The panel gave careful consideration to the mode of data transfer and concluded that diskettes bear significant risks**, including potential for damage and viral contamination. Accordingly, the panel recommended that the system permit data transfer via modem. Using identification codes ("keys"), data exchange would occur only when both sender and receiver verify a "digital signature," thereby ensuring not only the authenticity of the sender but also the integrity of the data being transferred.<sup>19</sup>

Public access to the data would have been provided by the elections agency over two parallel means: (1) an on-line system linked to the data base at the Secretary of State's Office accessible through terminals in each of the state's 58 county election offices, and (2) an Internet Web page. The data uploaded to the Internet would appear as submitted by filers and remain accessible for 10 years, after which the data would be permanently archived. Only if private vendors developed programs for incorporating the data into a data base would the public be able to manipulate data into meaningful formats. According to the panel's report, "[t]he Secretary can assume . . ." that the private sector will respond.<sup>20</sup>

The program envisioned by the panel and written into the legislative bill would have carried California to the forefront of electronic reporting technology. The EFAP report recommended purchasing one personal computer for each of the 58 counties at a cost of \$180,000, purchasing two in-house computers for the Secretary of State's office at a cost of \$18,000 and establishing an electronic reporting and disclosure system, including Internet access, at an estimated cost of \$340,000 to develop and \$99,000 per year to maintain.

Initially, it appeared that the panel's recommendations would become law. AB 2546 enjoyed considerable support in the legislature, unanimous approval in the editorial pages of major newspapers and no public opposition. However, when the bill reached the Assembly Appropriations Committee in the latter stages of the legislative process, it was killed in committee by a straight party vote, with all 12 Republican members voting against the measure.

The failure of California's legislature to approve AB 2546 can be attributed largely to partisanship. Despite the efforts of the Democratic sponsor to enlist Republican support through the Secretary of State, Assembly Member Speier and Assembly Republicans have long viewed each other with some animosity. Compound these feelings of distrust with election year jockeying—each party not wanting the other to claim credit for such a popular issue—and the partisan split forebode poorly for the measure. An anonymous leaflet distributed throughout the legislature the night before the committee vote provides further evidence of the partisanship nature of the vote. The leaflet, with a banner headline reading "What Jackie Speier Doesn't Want You to Know About Her Internet Bill," asserted that the measure protected Democrats with such provisions as *not* requiring electronic disclosure of statements of economic interests (as opposed to campaign finance reports). According to the leaflet, Democrats wanted to hide their sources of personal wealth when, in fact, the issue had never been considered by either Democrats or Republicans prior to the leaflet.

"The bottom line," said Kim Alexander of the California Voter Foundation, "is that Republicans looked for any reason at all to keep Democrats from getting credit for implementing an electronic reporting system in this election year. We might have a better chance of getting a similar measure through next year."<sup>21</sup>

Another oft-cited reason for the failure of AB 2546 was the general lack of technological sophistication by the state legislators—in other words, they were uncertain about the ramifications of campaign finance disclosure on the Internet. Privacy rights were frequently invoked as an argument against electronic disclosure. Contributors may feel frightened to have their addresses posted on the Internet. Despite the fact that such information is already public information as well as the willingness of the bill's sponsor to delete addresses from Internet postings (an action currently undertaken in San Francisco's electronic reporting system), many legislators remained distrustful of the new communications technology.

This uncertainty with the technology made several legislators susceptible to unfounded fears. For example, one lobbyist for a software

company opposed electronic filing and disclosure on the grounds that such a system would get the government into the software business and harm the private sector. No other software company felt the same way. In fact, lobbyists for several other private software firms testified in favor of the bill, arguing that a comprehensive electronic reporting system would add to demand in the private sector for high quality campaign software. Under AB 2546, the state may be obligated to provide candidates and committees with free basic software sufficient for state-mandated filing purposes, but the private sector could offer higher grade software capable of performing many more campaign and electioneering functions beyond simple reporting of financial activity. Nevertheless, concerns of a detrimental effect on the private sector continued to dominate legislative debate on the bill.<sup>22</sup>

In the end, although most California legislators appeared to believe that electronic filing and disclosure someday may be inevitable, as of 1996, the state legislature was not yet prepared to take that step.

#### **E. Several Key Issues Have To Be Addressed on the Road Toward Implementing an Electronic Reporting System**

Many states have given considerable thought to electronic filing and disclosure and have taken significant steps toward implementing some type of electronic reporting system. All elections agencies could learn from the activities of other jurisdictions. The experiences across the nation highlight several key issues that must be addressed in developing an effective system of electronic filing and disclosure.

Several questions frame the general analysis.

##### **1. *Should the program be voluntary or mandatory?***

Whether a state is willing to require candidates to file electronically depends on the general sentiment in the legislature toward campaign finance disclosure laws. Arguments about agency efficiency pale in the face of hostility toward campaign financial disclosure by some legislators. Still, there are significant benefits to requiring participation in an electronic filing program. High participation rates by candidates and their committees yield more accessible information. Moreover, where candidates are forced to participate, they may make demands of the system that ultimately benefit the elections agency. They may be more inclined to devote additional resources to the system in order to improve the quality of the system, ensure the system suits their needs, and raise their comfort level with electronic filing and disclosure. With greater participation, the elections agency also can learn more about electronic reporting and make better judgments about

adapting the system to their needs. Obviously with better data, the agency should be more effective at fulfilling its mandate to administer and enforce campaign finance laws.

Voluntary systems are attractive to many states that might otherwise shy away from electronic reporting. **The risk with a voluntary system, however, is that candidates simply will refuse to participate.** New York City, as noted above, has a relatively high 50% participation rate, although its public financing program may be the major factor. Candidates who file electronically in New York City receive their matching funds more quickly than other candidates. Most voluntary programs are not as successful. Kay Williams, of the Iowa Board, has expressed concern over the 1994 results in New Mexico, where only nine candidates volunteered to file electronically. In Texas, an attempt was made to enact a law forbidding the state elections agency from requiring that candidates file electronically. The effort failed, yet the agency still refuses to exercise its authority and require participation in the state's electronic filing program. Presently, the participation rate in Texas is less than 3%. Florida's Secretary of State has followed in the footsteps of Texas by deciding against implementing a mandatory system in the 1996 elections.

Voluntary programs may pressure an elections agency to provide more attentive services to candidates and to offer candidates built-in incentives to participate. New York City, for example, is considering adding elements to the C-SMART software that can assist candidates in organizing their campaigns and efficiently handle their paperwork. Clearly, if a voluntary program is implemented, the elections agency will have to find ways to attract participation. It remains to be seen in Iowa whether the software provisions to facilitate check-writing and other banking features for participating campaign committees, as well as other software perquisites, will encourage adequate participation.

While a voluntary system may be a cautious and constructive way to begin electronic filing of campaign statements, many states that have implemented voluntary systems have indicated that mandatory filing is the eventual objective. If states are going to accept the concept of electronic filing and disclosure as a superior form of public record management, then a mandatory system of electronic filing is as inevitable as the "old" requirement that all candidates and committees file paper campaign finance statements. Voluntarism in electronic filing is a transitional stage as elections officials experiment with the management and costs of the new technology. But in many cases the transitional stage is quickly coming to an end.

In order to ensure full electronic reporting and disclosure, and to provide a comprehensive electronic data base that permits thorough auditing by elections officials, states should mandate electronic filing. Only if participation is high enough will electronic reporting prevent time delays and costs associated with data entry and provide the public with meaningful access to sufficient campaign finance data.

***2. Should there be thresholds determining who shall participate in the electronic reporting program?***

Although most candidates and political committees across the nation have joined the digital age, not all political players have easy access to computer technology. Significantly fewer candidates and committees are familiar with modems and cyberspace technology. And a large number of candidates and committees may not have sufficient financial resources to invest in these technologies. As a result, mandatory filing schemes in many instances could impose undue burdens on candidates and committees with inadequate resources.

Monetary thresholds requiring that any candidate or committee that raises \$30,000 or more must file electronically is one means of alleviating these undue burdens. **Candidates and committees with inadequate financial resources would be exempt** from the burdens of computerizing their activities, while candidates and committees that have substantial financial resources available could easily afford to learn computer technology (and, in fact, probably have learned the technology for their own accounting purposes).

Thresholds vary depending on the size of the jurisdiction. San Francisco set its threshold at \$5,000. The California proposal set a threshold of \$30,000, a figure which is based on an amount slightly below the lowest level of expenditures by a successful legislative candidate in 1994.<sup>23</sup>

Florida considered one alternative to a threshold. Candidates in Florida would have been required to file a bona fide statement of undue burden in order to be exempted from electronic filing requirements. This option eventually was rejected on the grounds that it would be too easy for candidates and committees to avoid filing. In the meantime, however, the Secretary of State has refused to mandate electronic filing.

In Missouri, the legislature permitted paper filing, but established a penalty fee for paper filing based on the number of contributors as a means to encourage electronic filing, which for small campaigns would be *de minimis* but for campaigns with a large volume of contributors would be much higher. Missouri's system raises the possibility, however, that expensive campaigns

funded by the candidates themselves could avoid participation in the electronic program by paying a small penalty for paper filing.

In order to avoid imposing an undue burden on candidates and committees with limited resources, states should set a minimum threshold of contributions or expenditures above which campaigns will then be required to file electronically. That threshold may vary from state to state.

**3. *Should the program cover all elective offices or specified offices?***

The general trend in this area has been to limit application of electronic filing programs to specified offices, usually involving candidates and committees at the state level. In Kentucky and Michigan, electronic filing applies only to gubernatorial races. Hawaii extends its program to lieutenant governor, mayors, and prosecuting attorneys. Missouri's program covers all state elections, including state legislative candidates. California considered applying an electronic reporting program initially to statewide races and, eventually, to all state-level candidates, committees and lobbyists.

The major benefit of limiting application to specified races is that it gives the agency time to refine system operations. Once states have succeeded with specified races, the program can easily be expanded to include additional races. Ultimately, as elections agencies and private vendors become more adept at programming in this area, the need to "start slowly" might vanish.

In the meantime, however, developing an electronic reporting program should proceed incrementally since the technology is relatively new. It seems prudent to begin implementation of a comprehensive electronic reporting program for statewide campaigns and, once the program proves effective, extend it to other state-level campaigns and lobbyists. Eventually, the program could extend to local campaigns as well.

**4. *What is the appropriate method of electronic filing?***

Most states that have developed or are developing electronic reporting systems have chosen to limit submission to diskettes. The major reason given for this decision is that laws require disclosure reports to be signed by the candidate or the campaign treasurer and most states are uncomfortable at this stage with "digital signatures." Florida has rejected on-line filing for the same reason it turned to the private sector to develop software. In the words of Sandy Brill at the Elections Division of the Secretary of State's Office: "We are an elections agency, not a tech support agency." In contrast to Florida, the Iowa state legislature has approved a new law permitting the use of electronic signatures (private keys) on disclosure forms. California's advisory

panel is convinced that diskettes could be a mistake because they are subject to damage and they may transport viruses into the state system. Furthermore, the California panel is concerned that a high volume of diskettes would be more time-consuming than on-line assistance. The panel believes that on-line transfer is more secure than relying on diskettes, even if submitted with signed affidavits.

**The primary issue in choosing a method of filing is the willingness of the state to experiment with encryption technologies.** Diskettes are certainly a significant advance over hard copies and, in the absence of encryption, move agencies a long way toward acquiring campaign finance data in a useful electronic form. To date, only New Mexico has put into operation on-line filing, although Iowa's legislature has already enacted legislation permitting the use of encryption for filing electronic disclosure forms, and California's advisory panel has made persuasive arguments for its use in that state.

One question is whether, having required specified candidates to file electronically, they can be required to learn how to use modems and communications software. It is probably unreasonable to suggest that potential candidates would be discouraged to run for office because of such a requirement. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that at this level of sophistication the state will have to provide training on how to file electronically. Iowa, aware of the problem, is developing a video training manual and state-supplied software.

On-line filing through a modem is the superior method of electronic reporting due to its convenience and security. Nevertheless, filing via diskette also fulfills the needs of an electronic reporting system and may be easier to implement.

### ***5. How should the public access the data?***

Given the rising number of "net-surfers" and the multiple uses of Web pages, elections agencies should consider some form of public Internet display. Several states have already created or are setting up Web pages, often as in Florida, as part of a "government locator page." A wide variety of government services and information are offered on these Web pages, along with disclosure of campaign finance records. If that technology is not appealing, the data can be uploaded to other types of Internet sites such as a bulletin board system (BBS) or a file transfer protocol system (FTP).

**Direct access via modem is popular.** Alaska has had some difficulty in this regard using the remote access software called "PC Anywhere." Access in Alaska, for example, failed whenever the user did not

have the same software program. This problem is currently being addressed by state elections officials.<sup>24</sup>

Remote access raises some fear that a user might corrupt the database. A simple though not perfect solution is to maintain separate data bases, one for the candidates and another for the public.

Public kiosks are an expensive alternative to remote access, but very attractive where a large percentage of the population is not likely to have a computer. Both Kansas and Oklahoma have set up or are in the process of putting in public kiosks. Connecticut has plans to do the same. California also had plans to establish one remote site in every county based in each county clerk's office.

The least costly alternative is on-site terminals that allow interested users access to the data base by visiting the offices of the elections agency. Many agencies employ this option either instead of or in addition to other modes of electronic access. New York City until recently limited access to the data base to employees. The press or the public who were interested had to make specific requests. Now, however, the agency has installed an on-site terminal that provides the press and public access to much of the data maintained on the agency data base.

Clearly, the best method of public access to electronic campaign finance data would combine these communications tools. Public access should be provided via modem, preferably through a Web page on the Internet, in addition to access through public kiosks and in-house terminals.

#### ***6. How quickly should an electronic reporting program be implemented?***

The general tendency for implementing electronic filing and disclosure programs has been to proceed gradually. One option is to limit the number of candidates subject to the program. A second option, often done in combination with the first, is to begin with a voluntary program and then, once the program has proven itself, mandate electronic filing. Iowa and Oklahoma appear to be following this path. The proposal in California, after the first year of operation, would have required candidates and committees that receive over \$100,000 in contributions to file electronically. Then, in the following election cycle, the threshold would drop to \$30,000.

Although it is always reasonable to proceed cautiously in any new public policy venture, the reasons in favor of gradual implementation of an electronic filing and disclosure program lose some urgency as more and more states and local jurisdictions establish and maintain successful systems. The

experiences of other states can be an instructive guide to efficient planning and development of electronic recordkeeping of campaign finance data.

Nevertheless, elections officials in each state will encounter unique problems and needs, and they will have to become familiar with a new system of data management. At this point in time, a reasonable adjustment period in moving ahead with electronic filing and disclosure seems warranted. For example, the first election cycle of the program perhaps should be limited to statewide candidates and committees, followed by the inclusion of all other state candidates and committees above a certain financial threshold in the following election cycle and, eventually, extending the filing program to local candidates and committees as well.

***7. How much should be spent to establish an electronic filing and disclosure system?***

There is no single cost-analysis formula for constructing and operating a system of electronic reporting of campaign finance data applicable to all states. As shown in this survey, **costs vary sharply from state to state.** These cost variations depend on several factors. Some states will need to purchase or upgrade computer hardware for official state business, while other states may have such hardware already in place. Some states will have to alter campaign finance reporting methods in order to centralize the data base, while others may already have centralized reporting procedures. Some states may have to initiate a comprehensive training program for their staffs, while others may already have staffs that are reasonably computer proficient. The differences in hardware, operating procedures and training can be substantial between states and, consequently, so will start-up expenses for an electronic filing and disclosure system.

Nevertheless, some expenses in developing and implementing an electronic reporting system can be compared across the states. One such expense is the software program. States must choose whether they want simply to purchase electronic reporting software from a private vendor or develop their own software. But even in this realm, costs can be miles apart. For example, elections officials in Connecticut requested bids from private vendors for electronic filing software and systems management. Of the two lowest bids received, one was \$38,000 and the second was \$970,000. Opting for the first bid, the state has now run into problems with the vendor fulfilling the contract and has been forced into litigation.

The state of Kentucky has fared somewhat better than Connecticut with its low-bid private vendor. Elections officials in Kentucky contracted with a private vendor for reporting software and file systems management for \$40,000. Although there had been some initial problems with the software,

the program now appears to be progressing. The elections agency is even constructing a Web page for further dissemination of campaign finance data.

Other low-budget experiments abound but the results have yet to be seen. Arizona and Montana believe they can get adequate programs containing both filer-side and government-side software for under \$10,000. The state of Washington, which has already had some experience with filing programs, has issued an RFP for \$15,000. Hawaii is authorized to spend \$50,000, although that agency has received a free server worth about \$20,000.

Many of these low-budget experiments with electronic reporting are designed to provide minimal services. They tend to emphasize electronic filing more than data management and public disclosure. A few of these low-budget experiments, however, currently have some of the necessary infrastructure in place and may be able to develop a comprehensive filing and public disclosure program at lower cost. Arizona's program, for example, appears to be rather ambitious given the very low estimated cost, an expense which is further reduced by charging the public for on-line modem access to campaign records.

If a state must purchase or upgrade at least some hardware and develop a software program and file management system—with the goal of providing an extensive electronic filing and public disclosure system—the total cost will be considerably higher. Oklahoma budgeted \$72,500 for software alone, but only after a private vendor misleadingly told the Oklahoma elections agency that no state has spent less. New York City developed its own filer-side software for \$60,000 and set up the hardware and government-side data base for \$500,000.<sup>25</sup> Iowa received \$350,000 to develop and implement its electronic program. The California proposal has called for \$550,000 in total set-up costs: \$71,000 of which is for application development, and \$202,000 of which is for constructing a Web site and purchasing hardware and software for the state and counties to implement the public access data base system.

**The lesson to be learned is that states must first assess their needs and then carefully budget to meet those needs.** A comprehensive electronic reporting program will cost more than a limited disclosure program. States that require new computer hardware to handle an electronic reporting system obviously will have to spend more to implement a system. Depending on the particular needs and objectives of a state, the start-up budget for an electronic reporting system should range between tens of thousands of dollars to several hundred thousand dollars, followed by yearly maintenance costs that are likely to fall well within, if not below, current budgetary allocations for paper filing and disclosure.

## **F. Conclusion: An Electronic Reporting System Is Well Within the Grasp of Every State**

Electronic filing and electronic disclosure are not the goals of an electronic reporting system. The goals are to provide elections officials with the means to monitor and enforce campaign finance laws and to provide the public and press with accurate, meaningful information about the flow of money in elections. So important are these goals for fair and impartial democratic governance that enforcement agencies, the public and the press in nearly every state across the country are calling for electronic recordkeeping of campaign finance data.

These calls are reshaping the political landscape. Several state and local jurisdictions have already forged into the field of electronic filing and disclosure, setting up systems for candidate filings by diskette, modem or even electronic kiosk and making these filings available for the public on diskette, at public terminals and through the modem and Internet. Many more states are in the process of joining this technological revolution. Even the Federal Election Commission has constructed a new Web page for public access to campaign finance records.<sup>26</sup>

One point is clear: the notion that “there is not much out there” in the area of electronic reporting is a myth.

But much more can be done. States should be encouraged to discuss uniform or compatible formats and a nongovernmental agency should prepare to collect and share state data for analysis. Finally, steps should be taken to assist Iowa and others who share a vision of providing customized software to states and local jurisdictions that could not otherwise afford to develop their own.

The Information Age is upon us in nearly all respects of recordkeeping and data transmission. It is long past time to leave the quill pen era when it comes to campaign finance reporting as well.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Hedlund and Lisa Rosenberg, *Plugging in the Public: A Model for Campaign Finance Disclosure*, Center for Responsive Politics 27 (1996).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, at 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Quoting California Assemblywoman Jackie Speier, "Jones Calls for Electronic Filing of Campaign Finance Reports," *Metropolitan News-Enterprise*, Capital News Service (Dec. 15, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Although Michigan has a fully operational electronic reporting system, it relies primarily on an imaging or scanning system capable of uploading printed material onto a data base rather than filing electronically. South Carolina also relies on scanning technology, although the "data base" it has compiled is not interactive. In South Carolina, the public can download or view individual reports stored as graphic images.

<sup>5</sup> In Georgia, candidates file campaign finance reports only with county clerks. According to the state ethics commission, the cost of implementing a statewide electronic reporting system will be prohibitive until reporting is centralized.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to disclosure of campaign finance information, requests for absentee ballots and a description of government codes, regulations and biographies can be provided through the Internet, to name just a few uses of a Web page.

<sup>7</sup> The state of Washington currently provides Internet access through FTP only, not a Web page. Texas provides BBS access. Jurisdictions that are in the process of developing some form of Internet access to their campaign finance records include: Alaska, Hawaii, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Wisconsin and San Francisco.

<sup>8</sup> States that store limited information on their computer systems, such as data on gubernatorial candidates only or summary data, include California, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee and West Virginia.

<sup>9</sup> John Froonjian, "Activist Group Urges Campaign Finance Cap," *Atlantic City Daily*, September 14, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> States with fairly developed data bases which allow in-house terminal access include: Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Michigan, Ohio, South Carolina, and Washington, as well as the cities of New York and San Francisco.

<sup>11</sup> States with fairly well developed data bases which allow modem access include: Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Kansas, Michigan, and Texas, along with the City of Seattle.

<sup>12</sup> States with active Internet sites which including campaign finance data include California, Florida Texas and Washington (FTP access only), along with the City of Seattle.

<sup>13</sup> Hi. HB No. 6-S (1995); R.S. Mo. 130.057 (1994). Kentucky only requires gubernatorial candidates to file electronically.

<sup>14</sup> Electronic Filing Advisory Panel (EFAP), "Electronic Filing: A New Era in Campaign and Lobbying Financial Disclosure," report to the California Secretary of State (December 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Information on New York City's electronic reporting system comes from the 1995 NRC telephone survey; a report by the New York City Campaign Finance Board, entitled "On

the Road to Reform" (Sept. 1994); and Julian Brash, "Electronic Filing: A C-SMARTer Way," *The Guardian*, Council on Governmental Ethics Laws (Sept. 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Sources include telephone interviews with Professor Jack Whitmer of Iowa State University and Kay Williams, executive director of the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board, as well as an unpublished interim report by Professor Whitmer on the reporting programs.

<sup>17</sup> Government-side software describes software used by the state to retrieve and store data. Filer-side software refers to candidate and committee software used to submit data to the state.

<sup>18</sup> Assistant Secretary of State Bob Jennings, commenting at the final meeting of the California Secretary of State's Electronic Filing Advisory Panel (EFAP), September 1995.

<sup>19</sup> A "digital signature" in the sense used by California's Secretary of State means a numerical code (private key) known only by the filer and the Secretary of State, similar to a PIN number. The Secretary of State would have a numerical code known to all candidates and committees (public key), which would allow candidates and committees to transfer files to the Secretary of State. The interaction of the two public and private keys would verify the authenticity and "digital signatures" of the filer.

<sup>20</sup> EFAP, *supra* note 14 at 21.

<sup>21</sup> Telephone interview with Kim Alexander, California Voter Foundation (June 3, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Dana Wilkie, "On-Line Filing of Campaign Data Debated," *San Diego Union-Tribune* (May 18, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> EFAP Report, *supra* note 14 at 13.

<sup>24</sup> Alaska reports that PC Anywhere may have solved the problem. The state is also developing a Web page. See Appendix B.

<sup>25</sup> It is unclear how much of that cost, if any, was for hardware. The Board justified the expenditure by pointing out that the city's matching funds policy increased the program's complexity.

<sup>26</sup> The Federal Election Commission Web page address is: [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov)

# The Peter Ratings

by Peter Kim

Jurisdiction	Find site on the web	Find site on state/city home page	Site interface: User friendliness	Site interface: Options and features	Data readability	Data usefulness	Data relevance	Overall	% Score
Canada	0	0	5	5	5	20	3	<b>38</b>	<b>84%</b>
United States	3	0	4	3	4	15	5	<b>34</b>	<b>76%</b>
Illinois	2	1	3	4	4	15	5	<b>34</b>	<b>76%</b>
San Francisco	3	1	4	4	4	13	5	<b>34</b>	<b>76%</b>
Pennsylvania	3	1	5	5	4	10	5	<b>33</b>	<b>73%</b>
Indiana	3	1	5	4	4	10	5	<b>32</b>	<b>71%</b>
Seattle	1	2	4	4	3	12	5	<b>31</b>	<b>69%</b>
Michigan	3	1	3	2	3	13	5	<b>30</b>	<b>67%</b>
Arizona	3	2	4	1	5	11	4	<b>30</b>	<b>67%</b>
California	3	2	1	3	3	12	5	<b>29</b>	<b>64%</b>
New Jersey	1	2	4	4	4	10	4	<b>29</b>	<b>64%</b>
Utah	0	0	4	3	3	13	5	<b>28</b>	<b>62%</b>
New York City	3	1	4	3	2	9	5	<b>27</b>	<b>60%</b>
Minnesota	3	2	4	3	3	9	3	<b>27</b>	<b>60%</b>
Louisiana	3	1	4	3	3	9	3	<b>26</b>	<b>58%</b>
Virginia	3	1	3	3	3	8	5	<b>26</b>	<b>58%</b>
Florida	3	0	4	4	2	8	5	<b>26</b>	<b>58%</b>
Alaska	1	1	4	3	3	8	5	<b>25</b>	<b>56%</b>
Hawaii	2	0	4	3	3	9	3	<b>24</b>	<b>53%</b>
New York	3	1	4	2	1	8	5	<b>24</b>	<b>53%</b>
Texas	3	1	4	1	3	6	5	<b>23</b>	<b>51%</b>
Kentucky	3	1	4	1	4	5	5	<b>23</b>	<b>51%</b>
Iowa	1	1	4	1	3	6	5	<b>21</b>	<b>47%</b>
Washington	0	1	4	3	3	5	5	<b>21</b>	<b>47%</b>
Maryland	3	2	4	1	2	5	3	<b>20</b>	<b>44%</b>
British Columbia	0	1	4	2	3	5	4	<b>19</b>	<b>42%</b>

Score Range	0-3	0-2	0-5	0-5	0-5	0-20	0-5	<b>0-45</b>	
Average Score	2.21	1.13	3.83	2.79	3.13	9.13	4.54	<b>26.75</b>	<b>59%</b>
Median Score	3	1	4	3	3	9	5	<b>27</b>	<b>60%</b>

# The Peter Ratings

## Explanation of the Scoring System

### **Find site on the web (3 points)**

With the Internet growing in size daily, it is even more important that a web site be easy to find for it to be useful.

To locate each site on the web, I performed a simple search. Using Internet Explorer 5, I entered the following text "[name of state/city] campaign finance" in the address bar. This activates the MSN search engine (the default search engine for Internet Explorer 5), telling it to bring up a list of web sites that may contain relevant data. The resulting list of sites is arranged according to which sites the search engines perceives to be the best match.

Each site was given a score based on the following criteria:

- 3 points – the site was in the top 10 sites listed
- 2 points – the site was in the top 11-30 sites listed OR found direct link to the site after visiting one of the first 10 listed sites
- 1 point – found direct link after visiting one of the first 11-30 sites listed OR found site when I followed two links after visiting one of the first 10 listed sites
- 0 points – failed to meet any of the above criteria

### **Find site on country/state/city home page (2 points)**

I wanted to see just how well each Campaign Finance site was integrated with the main web site for the government.

Each site was given points based on the following criteria:

- 2 points – site was reasonably easy to access by both a set of links and by a site search
- 1 points – site was somewhat hard to find OR was only accessible by links or site search
- 0 points – site was very difficult to locate OR couldn't find a central web site for the state's/country's/city's government

### **Site interface: User friendliness (5 points)**

Each site was given points based on how intuitive it was to extract records of campaign financial activity. I judged the search forms or menu of links used to access the data by how clear they were to use. I also looked for online help and explanations for the different features of a site.

### **Site interface: Options and features (5 points)**

Each site was judged by the quality and quantity of features that enhanced both the data search forms and site navigation as a whole. This includes the ability to do the following:

- select from a list of candidates/committees for a search
- searching data over any user-defined time period
- view summary reports
- easily navigate to the main parts of the site
- use wild cards as part of the search criteria
- access to more advanced and optional search criteria

# The Peter Ratings

## Explanation of the Scoring System (continued)

### **Data readability (5 points)**

Each site was judged by the layout of their report data. I focused on the formatting of the data text, including font size, clarity of font, clear alignment of data values and their headers, use of tables to organize data, arrangement of reports that didn't fit within a single screen.

### **Data usefulness (20 points)**

This was clearly the most significant factor in judging each web site. I looked for the ability to "do something" with all of the data that each site provided.

I looked for the following features on each site and judged both on the quality and comprehensiveness of each feature:

- summary and overview data, including charts and graphs
- extensive use of links to additional relevant data
- comparing data between multiple candidates/committees
- sorting/resorting data
- downloadable report files that were usable in a database or spreadsheet program
- any other feature that enhanced the overall usefulness of the data

### **Data relevance (5 points)**

Each site was given points based on how current their data was—the date of the transaction, NOT the filing date—at the time they were reviewed.

- 5 points – latest transactions were from June to July 2000
- 4 points – latest transactions were from January to May 2000
- 3 points – latest transactions were from July to December 1999
- 2 points – latest transactions were from January to June 1999
- 1 point – latest transactions were from January to December 1998

# The Peter Ratings

Site URLs (ordered by their % Ranking)

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>URL</b>	<b>% Ranking</b>
Canada	<a href="http://www.elections.ca/gen_info/finance_e.html">http://www.elections.ca/gen_info/finance_e.html</a>	84%
United States	<a href="http://www.fec.gov">http://www.fec.gov</a>	76%
Illinois	<a href="http://www.elections.state.il.us/Cds/pages/statuswelcome.asp">http://www.elections.state.il.us/Cds/pages/statuswelcome.asp</a>	76%
San Francisco	<a href="http://www.ci.sf.ca.us/ethics/finance.htm">http://www.ci.sf.ca.us/ethics/finance.htm</a>	76%
Pennsylvania	<a href="http://www.dos.state.pa.us/campaign.htm">http://www.dos.state.pa.us/campaign.htm</a>	73%
Indiana	<a href="http://www.indianacampaignfinance.com/">http://www.indianacampaignfinance.com/</a>	71%
Seattle	<a href="http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/ethics/elpub/el_home.htm">http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/ethics/elpub/el_home.htm</a>	69%
Michigan	<a href="http://www.sos.state.mi.us/cfr/cfonl.html">http://www.sos.state.mi.us/cfr/cfonl.html</a>	67%
Arizona	<a href="http://www.sosaz.com/cfs/CampaignFinance.htm">http://www.sosaz.com/cfs/CampaignFinance.htm</a>	67%
California	<a href="http://www.ss.ca.gov/prd/prd.htm">http://www.ss.ca.gov/prd/prd.htm</a>	64%
New Jersey	<a href="http://www.elec.state.nj.us/">http://www.elec.state.nj.us/</a>	64%
Utah	<a href="http://governor.state.ut.us/lt_gover/a19961998.htm">http://governor.state.ut.us/lt_gover/a19961998.htm</a>	62%
New York City	<a href="http://www.cfb.nyc.ny.us/">http://www.cfb.nyc.ny.us/</a>	60%
Minnesota	<a href="http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/">http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/</a>	60%
Louisiana	<a href="http://www.ethics.state.la.us/view.htm">http://www.ethics.state.la.us/view.htm</a>	58%
Virginia	<a href="http://www.sbe.state.va.us/Campaign_Finance/">http://www.sbe.state.va.us/Campaign_Finance/</a>	58%
Florida	<a href="http://election.dos.state.fl.us/campfin/cfindb.shtml">http://election.dos.state.fl.us/campfin/cfindb.shtml</a>	58%
Alaska	<a href="http://www.state.ak.us/local/akpages/ADMIN/apoc/elfs/index.htm">http://www.state.ak.us/local/akpages/ADMIN/apoc/elfs/index.htm</a>	56%
Hawaii	<a href="http://www.hawaii.gov/campaign/">http://www.hawaii.gov/campaign/</a>	53%
New York	<a href="http://www.elections.state.ny.us/">http://www.elections.state.ny.us/</a>	53%
Texas	<a href="http://www.ethics.state.tx.us/dfs/dfs.htm">http://www.ethics.state.tx.us/dfs/dfs.htm</a>	51%
Kentucky	<a href="http://www.state.ky.us/agencies/kref/krefhome.htm">http://www.state.ky.us/agencies/kref/krefhome.htm</a>	51%
Iowa	<a href="http://www.state.ia.us/government/iecdb/filing/index.html#anchor52655">http://www.state.ia.us/government/iecdb/filing/index.html#anchor52655</a>	47%
Washington	<a href="http://web.pdc.wa.gov/">http://web.pdc.wa.gov/</a>	47%
Maryland	<a href="http://www.elections.state.md.us/campaign_finance/index.html">http://www.elections.state.md.us/campaign_finance/index.html</a>	44%
British Columbia	<a href="http://www.elections.bc.ca/fin/fin.html">http://www.elections.bc.ca/fin/fin.html</a>	42%

	Canada	United States	Illinois
simple search	not in the top 30 listings; couldn't find a direct link in any of the top 30 listings	2nd site listed	20th listing; visited 10th listing ( <a href="http://www.lincollnet.net/users/lrlwvpfa/Update.html">http://www.lincollnet.net/users/lrlwvpfa/Update.html</a> ) and found link to State Board of Elections
went to state home page and tried to find the site	unable to find the site by following links alone; used site search, the 12th listing was an indirect link (took me to the general info portion of the site)	no u.s. government home page	followed 4 links (agencies -> government services -> board of elections -> Campaign Disclosure) should have a subject link; the site search for "campaign finance" failed to bring up the home page for campaign disclosure or the board of elections
user interface	excellent; the site is both user-friendly and comprehensive in its methods of querying contrib/expense data; advice ranging from printing a page to querying the data that best suits you litters the site; every data search form was intuitive; the variety of data search forms were also well organized with explanations on each search form's purpose	overall I found the site easy to use; the search forms used for database queries were ultra-simple, just enter the name (full, partial) and go; if searching by name alone is no help, just go to the advanced search form where you can set more parameters for your query, very clean implementation; searching through the other data (HTML filings, downloadable reports, filing images) is even simpler if a bit tedious due to the amount of info	the data search engine had numerous data sorting options but ran well even when running the most general searches possible; the drop down menu and side bar more help than not; the site help worked when searching data
the data	unlike any of the state sites, Elections Canada specializes in providing overview and comparison data; both sections (candidates and political parties) have a variety of data search forms that range from a set of common pre-built queries and data tables to a customizable query; you pick candidates/parties from a list, a very nice feature; where applicable, the reports were resortable, which increased the data's value; as a bonus, candidate election results were also available; there were even top 10s for contributors; impressed by the site's comprehensiveness; unfortunately, the data is no more current than 1999 (and many portions of the data don't go past 1998 or even 1997)	the data is current (includes July 2000); there are four ways to get data from the site, the best being the one where you query an online database; nicely, the database reports had links within that led to more info on contributor, candidate, or even a brand new database report; the HTML filings were easy to look through, had detailed info, but not nearly as useful as the database reports; the downloadable report files were simply a comma separated version of the HTML filings; the filing images wasn't of much use; there were also summaries of presidential contrib/expense with links to database reports; only things lacking--no way to resort data or compare candidates/contributors	the data was both comprehensive and decently up-to-date (with entries as late as June 2000); the best part of the site is how the data is interlinked; e.g.: a list of year 2000 contributions provides data and a link to the candidate's/campaign's most recent filings, contrib/expense summaries have links to lists of itemized items, committees have links to candidates associated with it, etc.; data comparisons, resorting and big picture summaries are not available; no downloadable reports
technical issues	site went down briefly, probably due to server/database maintenance; one time the help link malfunctioned	several times the database failed to generate a report; within a group of links for the same contributor in a report, some failed to bring up detailed info on the contributor; download file had unknown file extension	when I ran my first set of queries and tried to follow the links to itemized data, there was no info available
overall impressions	Elections Canada deserves credit for being innovative in its presentation of campaign finance data; they have put a substantial effort in presenting their data in a way that helps the user gain insight in the financial practices of political parties and candidates; only the significant lack of current data within keeps this site from realizing its full potential	all in all, a well done, extensive site; they provide a variety of ways of looking at campaign finance data but the online database is the meat and potatoes of the site	given a little time to make sense of the site, I found the data reports above average, the links that lead to more relevant data was the best feature of all; data resorting and downloadable reports would be nice, but they have the right idea
Digital Sunlight Rank (Score)	Not rated	Not rated	#1 (99 pts)
review order	14th site visited; 7/27/00	19th site looked at, 8/1/00	4th site looked at; 7/21/00

	San Francisco	Pennsylvania	Indiana
simple search	4th listing	2nd listing; 1st listing was link to Bureau of Elections	2nd listing
went to state home page and tried to find the site	followed 3 links (boards & commissions -> Ethics Commission -> Campaign Finance); site search listed several links to parts of the Ethics Comm in the top 30 but none pointed to the home page or campaign finance section	followed 2 links (PA Elections 2000 -> Campaign Finance); site search was unable to locate a direct or indirect link to the campaign finance site	followed 4 links (State -> state agencies,... -> complete agency listing -> Indiana Election Division -> Indiana Campaign Finance Online); couldn't find a direct or indirect link using the site search
user interface	I found the site very easy to use; along with the usual options, there was a nice option to view all transaction types (contrib, expend, loans, etc.); the database can generate very large reports and handled queries without me entering any info into the search form at all; the provided list of committees adds to the ease of use	site was a pleasure to use; best feature--when you submit search criteria that doesn't apply to the election year you chose, the site tells you which search criteria are valid; after you pick a candidate and cycle, you can choose to view contrib, expend, both, even download a report file--allows you to pull all kinds of data on one candidate & cycle, very nice; you can even choose not to show certain data on the detailed reports	I was pleased with how easy it was to use; the options were straightforward; the data search forms were compact and was able to generate reports with minimal criteria; each form had a link to a more advanced search form, a nice touch
the data	the data is fairly current (up to June 2000) and detailed; I liked that the reports were easy to read and not cluttered-looking; each record had a link to more detailed info on the contribution, committee, or expenditure; however, the reports aren't as useful as they could be; no ability to resort, compare data; links within reports would be more useful if they could generate even more reports	the data is decently up-to-date (June 2000 looks like the cut off); I've already talked lots about the user interface but it really was well thought-out; I wish you weren't restricted to looking at one cycle at a time; you can't compare data between candidates or get a nice summary on long-term money intake and spending; there are no links in the data to view more info; what you can do is look at both a candidate's expenditure and contribution data with minimal fuss	the data was pretty current and thorough (up to early June 2000); the best part of this site was the presentation of the data; each record was put into a separate table, making the information easy to read; each record had a link that pointed to the filed summary report that the individual record was taken from, okay but nothing special; the downloadable report consisted of a set of files along with an instruction manual--too complicated
technical issues	none	none	the keyword search function refused to work
overall impressions	the site is well constructed, very solid design	I was impressed with the way the site handled queries that were not applicable to the data available; was disappointed that I couldn't look at contrib/expend for a whole year or even longer; still about as fun (or painless) to use as I expect a campaign finance web site to be	I find that the site was well designed overall but lacked some of the frills of the better sites
Digital Sunlight Rank (Score)	Not rated	#20 (66 pts)	#13 (79 pts)
review order	17th site visited, 7/28/00	23rd site looked at, 8/3/00	13th site looked at, 7/25/00

	Seattle	Michigan	Arizona
simple search	not in top 30; 5th listing ("http://www.margaretpageler.com/") had link to a politician's campaign finance disclosure data, was eventually able to get to general disclosure data	1st listing (for the Bureau of Elections)	5th listing
went to state home page and tried to find the site	followed 3 links (City Home Pages pull-down -> Ethics and Elections -> Elections); 1st listing of the site search was a direct link to site	followed 4 links (Michigan gov't pages -> state agencies -> Bureau of Elections -> campaign finance statements online) the site confused me by having what looked like two home pages, "www.state.mi.us" and "www.state.mi.us/migov"; no site search available	went to services and selected "Full listing", followed 2 links (elections dept. -> campaign finance -> campaign finance online searching); using site search, the 11th listing was a link to the "Full agency listing," not too great
user interface	pretty easy to use; instead of a data search form, you choose from a variety of links to static reports (i.e.: not database-generated); pick an election year then you can choose from a variety of summary reports or you can find a particular candidate/committee and then pull up numerous reports on them	awkward interface; after you get past whether you want to look at expenditures or contributions, the form page that awaits you has too many submit/clear buttons, causing some confusion; the explanation at the top is not as good as deleting most of the buttons	interface is easy to use, but can be restrictive; won't allow you to pull info using partial search criteria, this is particularly annoying when you don't know what the name of a contributor is; the search by committee is better, allowing blank entries in the data search form; the notes dispersed throughout are helpful
the data	data is pretty current (up to June 2000); the decision to not utilize an online database has put limits on the site's usefulness; don't like how you're restricted to searching data by single election year; this was the only site to display charts at all and I did find them helpful; the lack of a data search form actually made it easier to pull up reports-- instead of filling out a search form each time, you just chose from a menu of links; can't compare data amongst a variety of candidates/committees	the data was comprehensive and fairly current (latest entries viewed were from June 2000); the links within the data were okay but oddly some summaries that indicated that itemized contrib/ expend were filed failed to show a list of those items; spreadsheets downloads were accompanied by an explanation of the data in the various fields and the purpose of the downloads was clear, a nice touch	the data was reasonably thorough and decently current (up to May 2000); the data presentation is tidy and feels like it was designed for the average user, a plus; the persistent disclaimer that cumulative totals errors may exist lowers your confidence in the information, but they're right in warning you about it
technical issues	none	the downloadable reports were in a format not immediately recognizable by the PC	database was unable to generate report with over 500 records, the site informs user that they are aware of problem and are working on a solution
overall impressions	this site had a number of features that I liked; following links was easier than always dealing with a data search form; they created a lot of reports to compensate for the lack of a searchable database, but I believe the site is restrictive in ways that other sites aren't	unfortunately, the most noticed aspect of the site was the confusing form for the data searches; otherwise, nothing stands out, good or bad, about this site	the site felt very concise and helpful, making it a breeze to use; the data doesn't contain links and the database is not as powerful as those of other sites, but the presentation is one of the best I've seen
Digital Sunlight Rank (Score)	Not rated	#3 (95 pts)	#9 (89 pts)
review order	18th site visited, 7/28/00	6th site looked at, 7/24/00	10th site looked at, 7/24/00

	California	New Jersey	Utah
simple search	4th listing	not in the top 30; went to 10th listing ("http://ethanjones.homepage.com/"), followed these links (campaign finance reform at the state level -> election law enforcement commission) to get to the site	not listed in top 30; none of the top 30 listings had a direct or indirect link to the current campaign finance info (several linked to the 1998 data)
went to state home page and tried to find the site	followed 3 links (Government -> Secretary of State -> campaign finance info) there should be a more intuitive subject link; first listing under "campaign finance" using site search	followed 3 links (gov't connections -> departments -> election law enforcement) the first link didn't make sense; found easily using their site search engine (1st listing)	followed 6 links (gov't -> exec branch -> Lt Governor -> Elections -> candidates -> financial disclosure reports filed since 1996), link sequence was confusing, too long; site search didn't bring up a direct/indirect link to site
user interface	straightforward, but the clutter of links that you need to look through makes the interface feel more confusing than it really is	the interface was compact and worded in a clear manner; for contributions, you choose to look by contributor or candidate/campaign; the wildcards for the search parameters was a nice touch	the interface was easy to manipulate; the data search form didn't even need any filters set to retrieve data; the 3 different data search forms are accessible via a menu at the top of the screen that never goes away, a handy feature
the data	the sheer amount was great (which makes sense given the size of CA), covered the standard details, and somewhat current (up to June 2000); the search and sort capabilities are pretty sophisticated but the data itself isn't user-friendly; no general overview, no cross-referencing of data, no graphical presentations; offered two formats for downloading a report to your computer (excel and csv); expected the downloadable excel file to be different from the csv file (i.e.: the excel file did not utilize any of the data formatting capabilities available to that file format)	the available info on contributions had extra info about the contributor's employer along with their address and occupation that was helpful; no expenditure info at all or entries for 2000 contribution activity; the ease of use of this site made the data itself seem more useful, but there is still no strong effort being put in presenting the material in a way that takes advantage of modern computer and internet technology (data comparison, summaries, charts)	the data I found was current (up to June 2000) but there was a surprising lack of year 2000 data for many candidates that I browsed, giving the sense that the data is incomplete; the reports have links to more information (e.g.: a candidate report has links to all of his/her contributors that bring up a report on the contributors), a handy feature but not nearly as thorough as Illinois
technical issues	none	report download was not handled properly by my PC (incorrect file extension), at least the site explained what type of file it was	odd glitch--when I queried the database with zero parameters, some candidates appeared with no election year and the report links pulled up blank pages
overall impressions	I'm impressed by the vast quantity of data and the resorting capabilities; however, the site does little more than regurgitate this data back to the site user	the site deserves credit for creating a site that was pretty easy to navigate and to pull the info that was available, yet there is still much room for improving the presentation of its data; the lack of expenditure listings makes no sense	a no-frills yet easy-to-use site that has some nice touches but appears to be lacking current data; the site was harder to find than most sites
Digital Sunlight Rank (Score)	#4 (94 pts)	#12 (83 pts)	#14 (76 pts)
review order	first site looked at; 7/20/00	3rd site looked at; 7/20/00	15th site visited, 7/27/00

	New York City	Minnesota	Louisiana
simple search	1st listing	2nd listing was link to Campaign Finance & Public Disclosure Board	6th listing (for the Board of Ethics)
went to state home page and tried to find the site	followed 3 links (city services & agencies -> list page of City Agencies -> NYC Campaign Finance Board); site search unable to find a direct/indirect link to site	followed 4 links (gov't offices -> Boards, Commissions -> Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board -> 1999 Campaign Finance Summary); used site search, found Campaign Finance & Public Disclosure Board site listed at the top of the results	followed 3 links (state depts. -> Board of Ethics -> Campaign Finance Reports & Info); no site search available
user interface	the user interface was easy to use; the form elements are very spread apart--not the best implementation of a search form; helpful notes explain what happens when you leave a form field blank; the site warns you when a report is too long for the detail view or the downloadable report	instead of using an online database, all of the report data has been put into a variety of web pages that are accessed via links; makes pulling report information relatively easy, but makes it harder to pull specific info than a database query	the campaign finance section is exactly like Hawaii's, with the same positives and negatives
the data	the New York City site makes their reports almost as hard to read as those of the New York State site; data is up-to-date (even July 2000 entries); the database reports are detailed but there are no links that connect you to more data; the financial summaries are a good idea but they're so hard to read and you can't resort the data at all	the data is not current (nothing past 1999); I liked the comparison tables for the three branches of gov't for three years: 1999, 1997, 1995; found some of the reports confusing--at times I couldn't figure out who was giving the money and who was getting it; data presentation acceptable but could be made easier to read; unable to manipulate the data	the campaign finance section is exactly like Hawaii's, with the same positives and negatives
technical issues	none	none	the excel download was not immediately recognized by the PC (no file extension)
overall impressions	this site is a mixed bag of positives and negatives; the user interface is straightforward but the reports are difficult to read; the data is current and detailed but it's not very useful because it lacks links to more info; the summary is a good idea but it's not legible and not resortable	while showing that useful data can be made available without the use of an online database, they could still do more with what they have	the campaign finance section is exactly like Hawaii's, with the same positives and negatives
Digital Sunlight Rank (Score)	Not rated	Tied #30 (46 pts)	Tied-#5 (91 pts)
review order	16th site visited, 7/27/00	26th site visited, 8/7/00	7th site looked at, 7/24/00

	Virginia	Florida	Alaska
simple search	2nd listing	1st listing	not found in the top 30 listings; found site after going the 5th site listed ( <a href="http://ethanjones.homepage.com/">http://ethanjones.homepage.com/</a> ) and following 2 links (Alaska -> Alaska Public Offices Commission)
went to state home page and tried to find the site	followed 4 links (State websites -> Elections, State Board of -> Campaign Finance -> View Electronically Filed Campaign Finance Reports) don't like the last link being a scrolling text box; the site search couldn't find anything helpful for "campaign finance" but the State Agency Index link was available on the same page	followed 6 links (directory -> Online Sunshine-Guide to Florida Legislature -> Florida gov't www -> Division of Elections -> Elections online), not intuitive at all; the site search was not operational	followed 2 links (departments -> Public Offices Commission - APOC); site search unable to find the campaign finance site
user interface	decent, simple interface; would prefer that the form elements themselves weren't so "spread apart"	the interface was straightforward and full-featured, if a bit spread out visually; the "search by words/name that sound like" option is an interesting option that doesn't work very intuitively but it does allow you to make a broader guess when searching	the site interface was extremely simple to use; usually provided short list of links for database reports; data search forms only asked for a name of contributor/ candidate; one nice feature was that if you left a search form blank or entered just a letter or two, you would get a list of contributors/candidates that met your criteria
the data	data was current (up to June 2000) and thorough; I missed having links within the database-generated reports that would make each report more useful; the ability to generate downloadable spreadsheets from any report is a nice feature	the data is pretty current and thorough (up to June 2000); the anti-formatted reports look pretty bad (ruler anyone?), column headers don't quite line up with the column data; the summary is a good feature because it really does provide subtotals for each candidate or committee's contributions/expenditures based on a specified date range; I don't like that reports can't have data from more than one particular election; the ability to turn any database query into a downloadable report is helpful	the data is current (includes July 2000); the most notable aspect of this site was the difficulty I had getting the database to run a report; the site was slower than average, handfuls of links that should have led to more info were nothing but blank forms, sometimes links failed completely and all you got was a "Page cannot be displayed" message; there is also little functionality provided within the report data (e.g.: you can't resort data, not enough links to more detailed info, no data comparisons or summaries); this site is concerned with the security and privacy of the candidates'/contributors' data; sure, keep campaign finance data secure but why keep it private?
technical issues	report download was not handled properly by my PC (incorrect file extension)	report download was not handled properly by my PC (single quote characters in the file name and extension)	database ran very slowly; links to report data were unstable, did not work intermittently; this is only site that used a secure connection to the database, don't know if that is somehow the root of the problem
overall impressions	the user interface is friendly but the usefulness of the reports is limited because of the lack of links connecting to other useful data	this site implements a very good summary feature that facilitates comparing candidate/committee contributions/expenditures; the data display is surprisingly archaic; one very good feature isn't enough to make the site spectacular, and yet it makes this site stand out from the rest	unfortunately this site has 2 significant problems: the instability of the site and/or database and the inability to manipulate the report data in ways that would make it more useful
Digital Sunlight Rank (Score)	Tied-#5 (91 pts)	#11 (84 pts)	Tied #25 (55 pts)
review order	8th site looked at, 7/24/00	12th site looked at, 7/25/00	20th site looked at, 8/2/00

	Hawaii	New York	Texas
simple search	was not listed in the top 30; 5th listing ( <a href="http://www.student.mckenna.edu/dduran/cfr/states.htm">http://www.student.mckenna.edu/dduran/cfr/states.htm</a> ) had a link to the Campaign Spending Commission	4th listing (for the State Board of Elections)	4th listing (for the Ethics Commission)
went to state home page and tried to find the site	can't find campaign finance info while following links alone; site search engine couldn't take me directly to what I wanted, instead it gave me a couple of lists of gov't agencies with contact info and links	followed 5 links (gov't agencies/citizen access -> state gov't -> board of elections -> Campaign Finance -> Access the Electronic Filing System database) want a subject link; no site search available	followed 5 links (government -> state agencies,... -> Ethics Commission, State -> ethics commission website -> disclosure filing); search function only provides links to other search engines
user interface	simple design, graphics obscure the button text; the data search form is nicely compact and choosing from a list of candidates and/or committees makes the form more user-friendly	very straightforward; a handful of options makes the site easier to handle; the most generalized queries were handled by the site	simple to the extreme; a list of links of report totals sorted by date
the data	a respectable level of detail and coverage, the data lacks relevance (no 2000 listings); the summary data was not as useful as it could have been (too many listings), the search by office is more useful, no data comparisons or charts, excel download is only immediately good for import to database	the data was both comprehensive and decently up-to-date (latest entries viewed were from June 2000); the database reports made a limited use of links to more useful data; the text was notably small, distorted; the extra width of some reports made the data harder to understand; the sluggish database/back-end hampered my experience	data is fairly timely (up to/including June 2000); no online database, thus no sort and search capabilities; "downloadable detailed files" were just text pages that you have to save to your computer to use in other programs
technical issues	on my first visit the contrib./expense section was down; the excel download was not immediately recognized by the PC (no file extension)	the reports from the database take a long time to be generated	none
overall impressions	although the information is a bit dated, this site appears to contain a high level of detailed info; the user interface appears more intuitive but the information presented is not; the summary feature is a plus but the data presentation needs improvement	the hardware/software used to run this site is ill-equipped to run this site and all the information it contains; text and numbers MUST be legible and the width of the reports should nearly fit the width of the user's monitor, the report generator lags in comparison with other database-driven sites	the site has barely begun to fulfill its potential as a provider of useful campaign finance data
Digital Sunlight Rank (Score)	Tied-#5 (91 pts)	#2 (96 pts)	#8 (90 pts)
review order	2nd site looked at; 7/20/00	5th site looked at; 7/21/00	9th site looked at, 7/24/00

	Kentucky	Iowa	Washington
simple search	1st listing	not listed in the top 30; visited 2nd URL listed ( <a href="http://www.mapiowa.org/">http://www.mapiowa.org/</a> ), followed 2 links (Directory of Related Links -> <a href="http://www.state.ia.us/government/iecdb">www.state.ia.us/government/iecdb</a> ) to get to Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board	not listed in the top 30; no direct links to state campaign finance in the top 30
went to state home page and tried to find the site	followed 3 links (government departments -> search for state gov't web sites -> Election Finance, Registry of); site search was not operational	followed links (agencies & resources -> state government -> Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board -> Disclosure Report Summaries); site search was unable to locate a direct or indirect link to the campaign finance site	followed 4 links (government -> state agency links -> Public Disclosure Commission -> view reports), got confused when campaign finance or elections was not listed; site search did not bring up any useful links when I searched for "campaign finance"
user interface	absurdly simple is the best way to describe the user interface; admittedly, this is because the site is very limited in how it presents campaign finance data--no online database to query, just a list of links to PDF files of candidates' contrib/expend	the user interface was bare bones--just choose a database to search and enter a full or partial name of the candidates/committees you want to query; no other options available, which is disappointing despite the fact that this online campaign finance database is still a pilot program; one nice touch--the database can handle a blank query (not entering anything in the name field)	the data search form was nice and compact; overall the interface was intuitive
the data	the data is decently current (up to June 2000); the PDF files were very easy to read; cannot compare, resort, summarize, search data, or download the data for use in a database program; there are too many things that one cannot do on this site	the data is current (up to July 2000); the provided data is minimal--all you get is a summary of transactions for the reporting period and for the year so far; there is no detailed data to tell you where contributions came from and what the expenditures were for; you can't manipulate the data in any way to make it more meaningful (compare, sort, download to a database)	data is fairly timely (includes June 2000); the data search form only allows you to pull up a bunch of images/PDFs of the candidates'/committees' filed reports; database could only handle a query with a little over 100 results; there is no means to summarize, compare, sort data or download into a database for further analysis
technical issues	none	every time I queried the database, I got a "404 Not Found" error message even though I pulled up a page with report data on it; several times the database failed	none
overall impressions	the easy-to-read PDF files don't make up for the lack of features for analyzing campaign finance data	as a pilot site, there is still much work to do, particularly when compared to some of the finer web sites	I had trouble finding this site, and then after struggling with the site to extract the reports from the database, I wanted much more than just scanned images of the filed reports
Digital Sunlight Rank (Score)	Tied #15 (69 pts)	#35 (38 pts)	#10 (85 pts)
review order	21st site visited, 8/2/00	25th site visited, 8/4/00	11th site looked at, 7/25/00; revisited on 8/4/00

	<b>Maryland</b>	<b>British Columbia</b>
simple search	1st listing was link to State Board of Elections, just one click away from Campaign Finance section	not listed in the top 30; no listings had direct link to site
went to state home page and tried to find the site	followed 3 links (State Agencies, Boards and Commissions -> Elections, State Board of -> Campaign Finance); using site search, first listing was the State Board of Elections site	followed links (Legislative Assembly -> Site Map -> Elections BC); site search was unable to locate a direct or indirect link to the campaign finance site
user interface	this site is a breeze; there is just a list of links to the four available data reports on campaign finance	site interface was easy to use, but didn't have enough options and features; the advanced search option may be helpful if you don't know the name of the candidate or committee
the data	data is not current (nothing more recent than the end of 1999); along with the lack of an online database to query and the complete lack of features for manipulating and analyzing data, the presentation isn't easy to read; it doesn't feel like much time was spent looking at how their data reports would look on the web	the data isn't very current (only up to February 2000); the only thing I could do on this site was look at scanned images of the actual filed campaign finance reports; you could also view and print the PDF-format reports but they look worse than the images; no comparing data, no summarizing data, no sorting/resorting data, no downloadable data files
technical issues	none	none
overall impressions	the site is incomplete	the site is incomplete
Digital Sunlight Rank (Score)	Tied #27 (50 pts)	Not rated
review order	22nd site looked at, 8/3/00	24th site looked at, 8/4/00