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Chiang and Yee Challenge Californians to an Open Data 'Build-a-thon'

50 Million Fields of New Local Government Data Now Available

SACRAMENTO – Today State Controller John Chiang published the financial records for more than 4,800 special districts as part of his continued efforts to make public finance information more readily available. The new figures, totaling 50 million fields of data, allow users to track revenues, expenditures, liabilities, assets, and various fund balances across water, sewage, health care and other service-oriented local agencies for 11 fiscal years.

Chiang, joined by Controller-elect Betty T. Yee, also issued a wide open invitation challenging Californians -- from programmers and students to financial news publishers and nonprofit organizations whose objective is to promote civic engagement -- to take part in a Build-a-thon to create apps, databases, or interface tools with the new data. The best submissions will be showcased on the Controller's site, ByTheNumbers.sco.ca.gov.

"Today's update broadens the public's view of local government operations by more than quadrupling the amount of data available," said Chiang. "For most Californians, special districts are the least visible and understood form of government agency. However, because they have been charged to provide critical public services -- from water supply to fire protection -- these entities often possess vast powers to tax, issue debt, and manage public resources. I hope this website will shine more attention on these often-unknown but important public agencies and make more transparent their stewardship of the public's trust and money."

Neil McCormick, chief executive officer of the California Special Districts Association (CSDA), said, "As the most local form of government, communities have entrusted special districts to deliver core local services to their homes and communities. CSDA is proud to work with the State Controller in using technology to empower communities to be informed and involved in local decision making."

The raw special district data can be found [here](#). A user-friendly search interface similar to those currently available for the site's data for cities, counties and pension funds will be offered for special districts' data in February 2015.

Users can search the data to find, for example, that in 2013:

- 1 Special districts provided 60 different services, including staples like water and fire protection but also weed abatement, broadband Internet, pest control and snow removal.
- 1 Electric districts sold \$1.3 billion worth of self-generated energy and \$969 million worth of purchased energy.
- 1 Hospital districts reduced service charges with \$160 million in charitable discounts.
- 1 Airport districts collected \$88.6 million from concession sales, their largest source of revenue.

During the period before the special districts interface is launched, Controller Chiang, along with Controller-elect Yee, invite all those interested in advancing government transparency to use the raw data to create an app, a program, a database, or any new tool to show how special districts manage public resources.

"Simply by virtue of their quantity and diversity, special district disclosures pose a distinct challenge for individual Californians to view and absorb," said Controller-elect Yee. "Making these data broadly and easily available is an essential government function. We must also make it a priority to organize and display data so it can be viewed meaningfully and in context."

Build-a-thon entries are due by January 16, 2015. Submissions that take the most innovative and effective approach to making the data serve the public's best interests will be showcased at the same time the Controller's Office unveils the public interface for special district information. Build-a-thon rules can be found [here](#).

Controller Chiang has already posted more than 15 million fields of data covering 12 fiscal years for cities and counties and 11 years for public pension systems.

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