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Santa Monica Charity Honored by U.S. Congress

ProCon.org is honored after being named one of the top 25 free reference Web sites of 2011.

By [Pauline Vu](#) | [Email the author](#) | August 2, 2011 | [Print](#)

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ProCon.org was honored in the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this month for being named one of the top 25 free reference Web sites of 2011.

The Santa Monica-based charity provides unbiased information on a host of controversial social issues to encourage education and critical thinking.

"It is my distinct pleasure to honor the staff of ProCon.org and wish them continued successes in their service to the American public," Congressman Rob Andrews (D-NJ) said in a statement printed in the Congressional Record. "Their unbiased and truthful presentation makes a tremendous contribution to the political system."

Andrews sits on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.

ProCon.org was named one of the best free reference websites of 2011 by the Reference and User Services Association, a division of the American Library Association. Some of the other Web sites honored include WikiLeaks, UNESCO, Google Translate and TED.

While Rep. Andrews had visited ProCon.org's Santa Monica offices about a year ago to meet the staff and discuss the value of the service, the Congressional honor was unexpected, ProCon.org President Kamy Akhavan said.

"To have a member of Congress do this, particularly at a time when it's so rancorous, is just so flattering," Akhavan said.

ProCon.org, which has a full-time staff of seven and is funded by donations, opened its offices in Santa Monica in July 2004. The Web site provides nonpartisan information presenting both sides of the debate on 42 hot-button issues, including medical marijuana, abortion, alternative energy, the death penalty, illegal immigration and health care reform.

The site is free and requires no registration. It has been used in more than 1,800 schools in every state and 37 countries.

In 2010, the site registered 10 million visits. So far this year, it is on track to increase traffic by 30 to 35 percent, Akhavan said.

At least one-third of the readership is students, but ProCon.org is cited in a variety of places. The New Jersey Dept. of Medicine, for example, suggests readers learn more about medical marijuana by linking to ProCon.org.

ProCon.org founder and Chairman Steve Markoff expressed his thanks to Rep. Andrews in a statement. He highlighted the importance of nonpartisan, informative Web sites amid today's divisive political environment.

"Given the polarization of so many important issues today, thinking critically is vitally important to making better decisions about ourselves, our families, our country, and this shrinking globe we inhabit," Markoff said.

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