

## HOW PHILLY WORKS

### TV Political Ads: Competing for Your Vote

Pennsylvanians will choose their next governor on Tuesday, November 4.

We're already getting bombarded by political TV ads. And more are on the way.

Lots of ads are paid for by the candidates – plugging themselves and blasting their opponents. Like us, we're sure you wonder how much these ads cost. And who bankrolls ads that *aren't* paid for by the candidates.

Seventy is trying to get to the bottom of this. This fall, we are part of a first-time-ever project with the goal of helping voters understand who's behind the TV ads, how much they're spending and what their agenda might be. (Click [here](#) to find out how **YOU** can be part of this project too.)

And on September 17, Philly's own campaign strategist extraordinaire Neil Oxman will pull back the curtain on the often-secret world of TV ads. To join us for a special evening of drink and conversation with Neil and other political junkies, contact Development Manager Beth Vogel at [bvogel@seventy.org](mailto:bvogel@seventy.org).

This **HOW PHILLY WORKS** gives you the scoop on the political ads on your TV screen.

-- September 16, 2014

---

#### Why should I care about TV ads? I already know who I'm voting for.

Maybe you aren't persuaded by TV ads. But lots of people are, as much as they may not like to admit it.

#### How do you know TV ads impact voters?

We could give you a boatload of research. There are even studies that dispute this notion. Here's where we come down: Would so much money be spent on political TV ads if they weren't making an impact?

#### How much money are you talking about?

Here's a fascinating [snapshot](#) of spending on political TV ads on CBS3's regional affiliate KYW-TV: According to the [Sunlight Foundation](#) – a national group committed to transparent government – candidates and other political advertisers spent more than \$4.6 million between April 2013 and June 2014. Three of the top four spenders were Tom Wolf, Rob McCord and Allyson Schwartz, who were battling to win the Democratic primary for Pennsylvania Governor. Most Democratic ads run during newscasts. But David Letterman and Entertainment Tonight were pretty popular for both the Ds and Rs.

#### How much more money will be spent on the PA Governor's race?

It's too early to give a firm number. Consider this though: Seventy analyzed 4/5 of the ad buys on ten regional TV stations between July 1 and September 10. Nearly \$7.4 million was spent – about \$2.5 million by the GOP candidate, incumbent Tom Corbett, and almost \$1.7 million by his opponent, Democratic primary victor Tom Wolf.

#### Are non-candidates spending money on TV ads too?

Not as much. And how much will be spent going forward will depend on how close the poll numbers are. (The latest poll shows Wolf 24 percentage points ahead of Corbett.) According to the ads we looked at in the July 1 – September 10 time period we just mentioned, the top two outside spenders on the PA governor’s race were PA Families First (almost \$1.2 million) and NextGen Climate Action Committee (more than \$600,000).

### **Never heard of them.**

Neither have most voters. According to its [website](#), PA Families First is an independent political action committee (PAC) dedicated to “holding Gov. Tom Corbett accountable for his backwards policies, which have devastated our public schools and economy.” In other words, the group is working to defeat Corbett. Its TV ads prove that point. Major donors include the Democratic Governors Association, AFSCME (national public services employees’ union), the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association.

### **What about NextGen Climate Action Committee?**

This PAC is not too fond of Tom Corbett either. Its chief funder is California hedge-fund mogul Tom Steyer, whose passion is global warming. He’s supporting or opposing candidates in seven states, including PA, depending on their energy and environmental platforms. The PAC’s [website](#) and its ads say the Corbett administration favors companies that are damaging the environment.

### **How can I find out more about these non-candidate PACs?**

As a PAC focused in Pennsylvania, PA Families First must [register](#) with the Commonwealth’s Department of State. NextGen Climate Action Committee also targets federal candidates so it has to register and file statements with the Federal Election Commission. You can read those statements [here](#). Incidentally, Neil Oxman (the political strategist who is talking with us on September 17) says outside groups tend to run far more negative political ads than positive ones.

### **Back to the TV ads. Where does the spending information come from?**

As of July 1, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) began requiring *all* broadcast TV stations to post their political TV ads’ purchase agreements online. Before July 1, online posting was only required from the four largest stations in each of the top TV markets in the U.S. In this region, this included KYW (CBS3), WPVI (ABC6), WCAU (NBC10) and WTXF (Fox 29).

### **Do cable TV and radio stations also have to post ad buys?**

Not yet. This could come down the road.

### **Now tell me about the project on campaign ads in Philadelphia.**

Together with our partners – the [Sunlight Foundation](#), [Internet Archive](#) and the [University of Delaware’s Center for Community Research & Service](#) – we are scouring political TV ad buys in the Philadelphia regional market. A terrific group of volunteers are doing good old-fashioned data entry to get the information since most stations post their ad buys in not terribly user-friendly PDF files. The information includes the TV station, the date the TV ad runs, how many ads were purchased, their cost, the type of race (e.g., state) and who paid for the ads. [Here](#)’s where you can see the list of ad filings. But surveying and listing ad contracts is just the beginning...we’ll keep you posted as this project progresses.

### **I see not all of these ads are for the Pennsylvania governor’s race.**

That’s right. TV ads are also being tracked in hotly contested area Congressional races: Pennsylvania’s

Eighth District, where incumbent Republican Mike Fitzpatrick faces Democratic challenger Kevin Strouse; and in New Jersey's Third District, where Republican Tom MacArthur faces Democrat Aimee Belgard.

### **Do TV stations get to decide which ads to air?**

FCC rules state they can't refuse, edit or censor ads from candidates for federal, state or local office. But if a "legally qualified candidate" purchases air time, stations must give "equal opportunity" to buy time to other candidates running for the same office. The "equal opportunity" rule doesn't apply to non-candidate ads though. This means that, with the millions of dollars pouring into TV ad campaigns from third party PACs, TV stations can exercise discretion over what airs – although few do.

### **Who is considered a "legally qualified candidate?"**

There's no easy way to describe this. If you really want the answer, go to [FCC Rule §73.1940](#). Let's put it this way: Someone who hasn't filed the required paperwork to run for political office can't just produce a TV ad and expect to get on the air no matter how much he/she is willing to pay.

### **How can I keep up with the project?**

By keeping up with Seventy. We will be telling you about this project and other issues related to the November 4 election. In the meantime, you can always turn to [www.seventy.org](http://www.seventy.org) – or call our **new year-round elections and voting hotline at 1-855-SEVENTY (738-3689)** – for all the news as it happens.

\*\*\*\*\*

If you enjoy this series, please help us continue it by [donating](#) today or contributing via the United Way Choice option (#1786)! We are a non-partisan non-profit that does not accept government money – your support is truly appreciated!

As always, if you have any questions or ideas for future **HOW PHILLY WORKS**, please send your ideas to [futureofthecity@seventy.org](mailto:futureofthecity@seventy.org). Join the conversation - "Like" us on [facebook](#) and "Follow" us on [Twitter](#)!