

Over \$219 million spent on advertising in U.S. Senate and U.S. House races since Jan 1

Candidate and Interest Group Ad Volume, Spending Up Dramatically Over 2008; Party Spending Down; IGs Spending Over \$100 Million in Federal & Gov Races

(MIDDLETOWN, CT --) As of Sept. 15, an estimated \$220 million has been spent on political advertising in races for Congress, greatly exceeding the roughly \$135 million spent in U.S. House and Senate elections at this point in 2008. In the first election cycle following the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*, the airwaves are being saturated with more House and Senate advertising, up 20 percent and 79 percent respectively in total airings. The increase in spending is driven primarily by a surge in spending on U.S. Senate seats, which more than doubled compared to 2008. House spending is similar to 2008 due to increased airings in cheaper markets.

Table 1: Advertising in U.S. Senate Races 1/1-9/15*

Year		Candidate	Party	Interest Group	Coordinated	Total
2008	Ads Aired	135,630	28,733	32,292	1,082	197,737
	Row %	68.59%	14.53%	16.33%	0.55%	100.00%
	Cost	\$48,410,567	\$11,320,214	\$16,191,639	\$234,367	\$76,156,787
2010	Ads Aired	288,466	11,172	53,424	1,267	354,329
	Row %	81.41%	3.15%	15.08%	0.36%	100.00%
	Cost	\$121,362,709	\$5,680,645	\$31,071,829	\$1,025,670	\$159,140,853
% volume increase		112.7%	-61.1%	65.44%	17.10%	79.19%
% spending increase		150.7%	-49.8%	91.9%	337.6%	109.0%

*Amounts include both general election and primary advertising.

Table 2: Advertising in U.S. House Races 1/1-9/15*

Year		Candidate	Party	Interest Group	Coordinated	Total
2008	Ads Aired	133,828	5,923	10,574	3,200	153,525
	Row %	87.17%	3.86%	6.89%	2.08%	100.00%
	Cost	\$50,476,467	\$1,932,845	\$4,697,338	\$2,030,892	\$59,137,542
2010	Ads Aired	165,749	4,958	13,520	515	184,742
	Row %	89.72%	2.68%	7.32%	0.28%	100.00%
	Cost	\$50,175,047	\$1,851,488	\$7,723,781	\$133,363	\$59,883,679
% volume increase		23.9%	-16.3%	27.9%	-83.9%	20.3%
% spending increase		-0.6%	-4.2%	64.4%	-93.4%	1.3%

*Amounts include both general election and primary advertising.

CITE SOURCE OF DATA IN ALL TABLES AS:

Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project

“One reason for the increase in overall spending has to be the fact that both Republicans and Democrats have a legitimate shot of having majorities in Congress after November’s elections,” said Travis Ridout, associate professor of political science at Washington State University and co-director of the Wesleyan Media Project. “Surely, the Citizens United Supreme Court decision, which opened the door to unlimited corporate and union donations to groups airing political ads, has also contributed to the overall increase in spending.”

Although overall advertising volume has increased, those numbers are driven primarily by large increases in volume of candidate and interest group airings. Party spending is down substantially, especially in U.S. Senate races, where 2010 figures are 61 percent lower than at this same time two years ago. The primary reason for the drop in party-sponsored ads is the absence of comparable Democratic Party ads in Senate races. In 2008, for example, by September 15th the Democratic Party had sponsored nearly 1 in every 4 pro-Democratic ads. (The Republican Party in 2008 only accounted for roughly 4 percent of pro-Republican Senate ads.) This year, however, the Democratic Party has sponsored only 7 percent of its candidates’ Senate ads.

The increase in interest group sponsorship is substantial, but still relatively modest as a share of all ads aired. “Despite the increase in interest group airings, it is not the case that interest groups are dominating the ad war more this cycle as a percentage of total airings,” said Michael Franz, associate professor of government at Bowdoin College and co-director of the Wesleyan Media Project. “Rather, we are seeing a relatively consistent distribution of interest group airings across federal races, at least in the aggregate.”

In fact, although interest group airings represent a slightly higher proportion of total airings in House races compared to 2008 (7.3 percent compared to 6.9 percent), the proportion of interest group ads as a percentage of total U.S. Senate airings actually fell slightly (from 16.3 to 15.1 percent). And it is not the case that stable interest group participation as a proportion of all airings is due to concentration on gubernatorial races; as noted below, interest group airings comprise almost 12 percent of gubernatorial ads, a figure in between House and Senate participation rates.

Table 3: Advertising in Gubernatorial Races 1/1-9/15*

Year		Candidate	Party	Interest Group	Coordinated	Total
2010	Ads Aired	616,074	23,817	85,854	0	725,745
	Row %	84.89%	3.28%	11.83%	0.00%	100.00%
	Cost	\$274,937,217	\$10,881,801	\$63,412,434	\$0	\$349,231,452

*Amounts include both general election and primary advertising.

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Almost \$350 million has been spent to date on gubernatorial ad airings, with candidates sponsoring roughly 85 percent of total spots. “The amazing thing is that almost a third of

that spending—\$89 million—came from one gubernatorial candidate: Meg Whitman in California,” said Michael Franz.

As of September 15, over \$100 million has been spent by interest groups in key federal and gubernatorial races. Table 4 displays the top 10 interest group spenders by type of organization, number of airings and party affiliation (for a list of the top 30 along with more information about which races each is active in, see <http://election-ad.research.wesleyan.edu/>). Among the top 30 interest group spenders, Republican-leaning organizations greatly outspent Democratic ones by a margin of over 2:1. Furthermore, 12 of the top 30 group spenders are 501(c)(4), 501(c)(5), or 501(c)(6) organizations who do not have to disclose their donors.

Table 4: Top 10 Interest Group Spenders by Volume and Ad Count (through 9/15)*

Name	Group Type**	Estimated Spending	Spot Count	Party Lean
Republican Governor's Association	527	\$12,366,821	19,196	Republican
Let's Get to Work	PAC	\$6,983,220	12,747	Republican
US Chamber of Commerce	501(c)(6)	\$6,747,946	8,462	Republican
California Working Families for Jerry Brown for Governor	527	\$6,614,872	2,327	Democrat
AFSCME	501(c)(5)	\$6,078,031	5,878	Democrat
Crossroads Grassroots Policy Strategies	501(c)(4)	\$5,908,584	6,868	Republican
Small Business Action Committee	501(c)(4)	\$3,740,858	2,542	Republican
Florida First Initiative	527	\$3,527,443	5,009	Republican
Back to Basics Political Action Committee	PAC	\$3,507,733	4,480	Democrat
Americans for Job Security	501(c)(6)	\$3,281,984	6,041	Republican

*Amounts include both general election and primary advertising.

**Groups often have more than one classification through which they conduct their political or election-related activities. The entry in this table reflects our best guess as to what organizational form funded the ads. The group type assignment may not be completely accurate because the ad disclaimers do not signify the tax entity through which the parent organization funded the ad buy.

***For a table of the Top 30 Spenders, see: <http://election-ad.research.wesleyan.edu/>

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“Many expected in the cycle after the Citizens United decision that we would see a lot of corporations publicly in the mix,” noted Erika Franklin Fowler assistant professor of government at Wesleyan University and co-director of the Wesleyan Media Project, “but

to date that has not materialized. Instead, we are seeing evidence of changing tactics as groups seek shelter in the rules for non-profits that allow such organizations to withhold their donor names.”

Although interest group participation is comparable overall between 2008 and 2010, there is variation across key races. In particular, interest group airings comprise more than 30 percent of all airings in the primary and general election phases of the Arkansas, California, and Alaska Senate races.

Given the large number of competitive Senate race this year, it is no surprise that six races have already seen over \$10 million in spending on ads. At the top of the list is Florida’s three-way Senate race, where almost \$22 million has already been spent as of September 15. This total includes the nearly \$800,000 that independent Charlie Crist has spent on close to 1,200 ads this month. His only other advertising this year was in March and April, before he left the Republican Party. Pennsylvanians have seen over \$17 million worth of ads, and in Harry Reid’s battle to save his Nevada Senate seat, over \$13 million has been spent on ads. Senate races in Colorado and Connecticut—along with January’s special election in Massachusetts—all clocked in with 8-figure spending amounts on advertising.

Table 5: Top US Senate Races in 2010 by Spending (through 9/15)*

State	Total spending	Total**	Pro-Dem Ads	Pro-GOP Ads
FL	\$21,981,660.00	46,374	35,462	9,096
PA	\$17,540,647.00	39,445	21,179	18,266
NV	\$13,541,643.00	39,049	18,187	20,179
MA	\$11,491,161.00	10,136	5,035	5,101
CT	\$10,437,188.00	9,493	1,437	8,048
CO	\$10,270,176.00	19,880	11,129	8,373
AR	\$9,855,099.00	28,471	25,137	2,780
WI	\$8,629,002.00	25,597	7,664	17,933
CA	\$8,384,350.00	9,137	770	8,367

*Amounts include both general election and primary advertising.

**Party totals do not always add up to overall total due to presence of third party factor and/or an indeterminate party benefactor.

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Top House races are an open-seat race in Tennessee’s 8th district, the special election and subsequent regular election in Pennsylvania’s 12th district and Kansas’s 4th congressional district, another open-seat race.

“In short, the story so far is one of increased advertising and increased spending overall, especially by Senate candidates and interest groups, but not one of interest group domination, at least in the aggregate,” said Fowler.

Table 6: Top House Races in 2010 by Spending (through 9/15)*

State	District	Total spending	Total	Pro-Dem Ads	Pro-GOP Ads
TN	8	\$3,517,683.00	10,261	375	8,445
PA	12	\$3,340,976.00	8,503	4,271	4,232
KS	4	\$2,149,221.00	9,071	1,631	7,440
FL	2	\$1,835,923.00	7,608	7,397	211
MN	6	\$1,552,705.00	2,014	978	1,036
HI	1	\$1,457,698.00	6,734	4,213	2,264
OK	5	\$1,337,644.00	3,480	260	3,220
FL	8	\$1,240,423.00	1,535	854	665
TN	6	\$1,183,757.00	2,420	82	2,338
MI	7	\$1,138,072.00	2,672	1,665	1,007

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The Wesleyan Media Project provides real-time tracking and analysis of all political television advertising in real-time. Housed in Wesleyan's Quantitative Analysis Center – part of the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life – the Wesleyan Media Project is the successor to the Wisconsin Advertising Project, which disbanded in 2009. It is directed by Erika Franklin Fowler, assistant professor of government at Wesleyan University and her collaborators Michael M. Franz, associate professor of government at Bowdoin College and Travis N. Ridout, associate professor of political science at Washington State University.

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The Wesleyan Media Project's website can be found here:

<http://election-ad.research.wesleyan.edu/>

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