



AHIP Million-Dollar Ad Campaign Targets Seniors

By Sam Stein

October 13, 2009

In a late-effort push to alter or torpedo health care reform, the major lobby for private insurers has made a multi-state, million-dollar ad purchase claiming that seniors will see their care cut under Democrat-crafted legislation.

America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), which released a highly critical (and widely criticized) report slamming the Senate Finance Committee's reform proposal, has quietly put out a new spot claiming that millions of seniors will see their Medicare slashed by Congress.

"Is it right to ask 10 million seniors on Medicare advantage for more than their fair share?" the ad asks. "Congress is proposing over 100 billion in cuts to Medicare advantage. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office says many seniors will see cuts in benefits."

The spot, according to a Democratic ad tracker is running in a variety of states, including Pennsylvania, Colorado, New Mexico, Missouri, Louisiana and Nevada. The money behind it is impressive. Slightly more than \$1 million has been spent for it to air during a ten-day period beginning this past Monday (that total doesn't include expenditures in Pennsylvania, which the tracker didn't have readily available).

That the private insurance industry would make such a splash so late in the health care debate is a reflection of just how hotly contested the process has become as it enters the critical voting stage.

"It is potentially a very big wallet. It is going to add a lot more horsepower to their complaints," said Evan Tracey, founder and president of Campaign Media Analysis Group. "What is more interesting about this is, does it foretell something? Obviously they have access to capital and their industry will be the most impacted. But by and large they have stayed out of the debate [to this point]... This is the first industry marker they put down and the ad they put down today is all about Medicare advantage. These are the things that suggest they will be a big player down the stretch."

Indeed, as noteworthy as AHIP's newest ad, the fact that it took them this long to lash out against reform is equally remarkable. Since the beginning of the year, Tracey says, \$125 million has been spent by roughly 80 different groups on health-care-related ads. AHIP,

however, has "largely kept their powder dry" even as \$23 million worth of ads critical of the industry have run.

"They have a pretty big message gulf to fill," Tracey said. "They were in that category of general health care stuff. The only thing they had in their early stuff was the need for bipartisan reform."

The targets of the current ad purchase seem relatively clear. Putting up a spot in Nevada is likely meant to pressure Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) before he merges the two pieces of legislation that have made their way through the Senate. The spots in Colorado are likely intended to impact freshmen Democratic Sen. Michael Bennet, while the Louisiana purchase is almost certainly geared towards centrist Democrat Mary Landrieu. Spending money in Missouri is something of a mystery, as progressives insist that Sen. Claire McCaskill, (D-MO) will be a reliable vote.

A call to AHIP's press office was not returned.