



\$1 Billion Spent On Political Ads *This* Year, Expert Says

By Evan McMorris-Santoro

Talking Points Memo

December 9, 2009

This was the year to invest in a TiVo -- if you didn't have a fast-forward button on your TV, chances are you wished you did during the health care debate. A leading expert in political advertising says \$1 billion was spent on political ads this year, with the vast majority of that coming from issue advocacy groups.

The health care debate fueled much of the spending this year, according to Evan Tracey of TNS Media Intelligence. But, ironically, the stepped up pace of political advertising may not continue through to next year's midterm election. In an interview with *Media Life* magazine yesterday, Tracey said economic factors could keep candidates next year from passing 2006's midterm election record of \$3.4 billion in ad spending.

Tracey still predicts political ad spending will be "robust" next year, regardless of the economy. Especially when it comes to health care reform-focused ads, which Tracey says will continue apace regardless of what happens in D.C.:

What you're starting to see is that spending is ramped up and it's liable to stay that way. It'll go from the policy into the politics next year. Every member of the House and Senate in tough districts will take votes that hurt or help one side or the other, and so some will try to unseat those who didn't vote with their particular point of view.

As for this year's \$1 billion in political ad spending, Tracey says two-thirds of that money was spent on issue ads, with the largest chunk spent on (what else?) arguing both sides of the health care debate on TV:

Healthcare is probably going to be a bit more than a third of total issue spending this year, and the thing behind that is stuff related to the cap-and-trade bill, those have been the two biggest by far.

Should you be inclined to avoid the blizzard of ad spending entirely, Tracey says you'll have a hard time escaping political ads next year. Ads will permeate the Internet and other new media outlets. But the best way to steer clear of political ads will continue to be your TV's remote control, Tracey says:

I think more money means more money for more things rather than one taking from the other. Spot TV is still the dominant vehicle, but local cable is well situated for some of the local races. You'll probably see more of them relying on local cable as an economics thing. They can be more zeroed in to their local districts, etc.