

## Health reform ad war clears \$200M mark

*By Ben Pershing*  
*January 6, 2010*

As negotiations on Capitol Hill over health-care reform reach their final phase, so too has the record-breaking battle of the airwaves.

Total television ad spending on all sides of the health-care debate has now exceeded \$200 million, according to the Campaign Media Analysis Group. No other past issue advocacy campaign tracked by the firm has cost even a quarter of that amount.

Through July, supporters of Democrats' reform plans had outspent anti-reform groups by more than a 2-to-1 margin. But opponents have stepped up their efforts since then, and CMAG puts the current tally at \$95 million for reform, \$86 million against it and roughly \$25 million for ads with neutral messages or focused on narrow slices of the reform debate.

Health Care for America Now, a coalition of pro-reform groups, launched a \$400,000 ad campaign Tuesday calling for "good health care we can afford with the choice of a public health insurance option." The spot, embedded above, is airing on national cable as well as local D.C. stations, part of a multimedia "Finish Reform Right" campaign by the group.

On a narrower scale, the Coalition for a Competitive Pharmaceutical Market, backed by generic drug makers, aired a Christmas-themed ad in late December urging Congress to "stop putting brand drug company profits over patients."

But while a handful of groups are still trying to use ads to influence the bill before the House and Senate agree and send it to President Obama's desk, others are looking forward to the effect the health-care measure will have on 2010.

"I think we're in this spot right now where regardless of what happens with the final bills, it has moved into the political landscape," said Evan Tracey, CMAG's chief operating officer. In the last month, Tracey said, many ads have "more or less become electioneering."

After the Senate voted Christmas Eve to approve its version of the health-care measure, Sen. Ben Nelson (D) launched a television ad in Nebraska explaining to his constituents - the majority of whom, polls show, oppose the reform bill -- why he voted against it. The spot came after several months during which a host of groups, including Americans for Prosperity and the Independent Women's Forum, aired ads urging Nelson to oppose the measure.

Nelson isn't up for reelection until 2012, but health care-centered ad campaigns are expected to heat up in several 2010 House and Senate contests.