



First on the Ticker: Health reform critics saturate TV airwaves

*From CNN Political Editor Mark Preston
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Washington (CNN) – Opponents of President Obama’s approach to health care reform have outspent supporters by more than \$7 million in the past 30 days in what has become the most expensive one year, single issue advocacy campaign on television in the nation’s history.

So far, more than \$151 million has been spent in 2009 on TV ads by organizations promoting, opposing or simply weighing in on the health care debate, according to an exclusive analysis conducted for CNN by TNSMI-Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG).

Supporters of Obama’s approach to health care reform began airing TV commercials earlier in the year than opponents and account for \$61 million, while opponents have spent \$52.3 million and groups with an interest in the debate but not advocating a position have dedicated \$38 million.

In the past 30 days, supporters of Obama's approach to health care reform spent nearly \$12 million on TV ads while opponents countered with \$19.1 million.

“We are starting to see a separation in the messaging,” said Evan Tracey, president of CMAG and CNN’s consultant on political television advertising. “Groups that are opposed to President Obama’s health care plan are starting to turn up the volume in key states to put pressure on lawmakers to vote against these bills.”

On Wednesday, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce spent a whopping \$1.5 million alone to air an ad linking the depressed economy to the health care debate in cities stretching from Juneau, Alaska, to Roanoke, Virginia.

“This advertising is turning very gray in terms of the senior voters they are targeting and the mood of the electorate who are pessimistic about the economy,” said Tracey.

Americans for Stable Quality Care, a coalition of health care interest and liberal advocacy groups, spent more than \$8.2 million over the past month on commercials to lead the spending in support of Obama’s approach to reform. The Chamber spent \$9.7 million on TV ads, while America’s Health Insurance Plans, an association of insurers, dedicated \$5.5 million to commercials during this same 30 day time period.

The House is meeting for a rare weekend session as the Democratic majority tries to pass a health care bill.

“The Chamber ad combined with a lot of weekend news coverage of the new unemployment numbers is going to be a potential one-two punch as House Democrats try to pass a health care reform bill,” Tracey said.

Tracey is referring to news Friday that the nation’s unemployment rate rose to 10.2 percent, the highest it has been since 1983.