

Health care ads boon for South Bend-area TV

Stations find unexpected revenue during nonelection year.

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Washington's wrangling over health care reform is benefiting Indiana television stations with a surge in advertising from special-interest groups.

Revenue from political advertising has "been a pleasant surprise" in a nonelection year, said John Mann, president and general manager at WSBT-TV.

Demand is so high for advertising slots that station managers have had to make sure their local clients aren't bumped.

"When this political advertising started, we planned accordingly," said John O'Brien, general manager at WNDU-TV. "We want to make sure we take care of our regular advertisers."

Eight groups are running health-reform advertising on WNDU, O'Brien said.

Both Mann and O'Brien said various advertisers end up offering a collective balance of viewpoints on the issue.

"As soon as one side comes out, there's somebody there to counter it, typical of any political issue," O'Brien said.

More than 70 groups are focusing their advertising on a handful of states that are home to pivotal lawmakers, according to the Campaign Media Analysis Group.

Indiana is seen as one of those key states because Sen. Evan Bayh, a Democrat, has not voiced an official position on the health care bill the Senate began debating this week.

For example, advocacy groups spent \$1 million on 1,900 advertisements that ran on Indiana TV stations in just one seven-day period ending Nov. 18, the CMAG reported.

A representative of WSJV-TV, Fox 28, was not available to comment for this article.