



Campaign commercials flood Massachusetts TV

*By CNN Deputy Political Director Paul Steinhauser
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(CNN) - With less than a week to go until a special Senate election in Massachusetts, the state's airwaves are packed with campaign ads as Democrat Martha Coakley and Republican Scott Brown battle to fill the last three years of the late Sen. Ted Kennedy's term.

Coakley, the Massachusetts attorney general, has spent \$605,000 to air campaign television ads since Friday, according to Evan Tracey, president of Campaign Media Analysis Group and CNN's consultant on political advertising. Brown, a state senator, has spent \$550,000 since Christmas. And those figures don't include ad money spent by national and state political party organizations and independent groups in the past few weeks.

Three new commercials in support of Coakley attempt to tie Brown to national Republicans, a move that may excite the Democratic base in a state that is considered largely Democrat.

"He drives around in a pickup truck. But you gotta look under the hood to find the real Scott Brown. On health care? Brown wants to be the deciding vote to kill Ted Kennedy's legislation," says the narrator in a new commercial released by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. The DSCC says their ad will run through next Tuesday's election.

There is a similar tone from a commercial from an independent group, the Service Employees International Union.

"Before you vote for Senate, here's a few things you should know about Scott Brown. He calls himself independent, but voted with Republican leadership 96 percent of the time," says the narrator of the ad.

The SEIU says they're spending nearly \$700,000 on their new ad, which also tries to tie Brown to conservative tea party organizations that back former Alaska governor and 2008 Republican Vice Presidential nominee Sarah Palin by saying "that Brown's campaign is being supported by the same extremist group that backs Sarah Palin."

The DSCC and SEIU commercials hit Massachusetts airways immediately after a Coakley campaign ad began airing, which asks "who is Scott Brown really? A Republican. In lockstep with Washington."

Brown's campaign quickly responded to the Coakley ad.

"By now, you've probably seen the negative ads launched by Martha Coakley and her supporters. Instead of discussing issues like health care and jobs, they decided the best way to stop me is to tear me down," fires back Brown in his commercial. "Their attack ads are wrong and go too far."

The ad is one of three his campaign is currently airing on television. The two others deal with national security and health care, where Brown says a re-start is needed in the push to reform the country's health care system.

Brown is getting some outside help in his battle against the Democrats health care plan. Americans for Responsible Health Care, a political 527 group formed by Bill Binnie, a Republican businessman who's running for Senate in neighboring New Hampshire, is up with an ad that says "we need Scott Brown's vote in Washington. Together lets stop the politicians take over of our health care."

The DSCC Wednesday claimed that the new ARHC commercial is illegal. In an email to reporters, the DSCC says Binnie is breaking federal campaign finance laws.

"We knew it was strange for a New Hampshire Republican to plaster himself on the Massachusetts airwaves for Scott Brown, but now we know it's illegal," says DSCC National Press Secretary Deirdre Murphy.

The Brown campaign says they didn't ask for Binnie's help.

"I don't know what's worse - Martha Coakley's negative campaign, or outside groups suddenly jumping into the race. I wish we could stop both from happening," responded Eric Fehrstrom, a senior Brown campaign adviser.

Also getting into the mix in the ad wars are the American Future Fund, an outside group opposing Coakley, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Massachusetts Democratic Party.

The emphasis in this race on health care is obvious. While the late Sen. Kennedy championed health care for all Americans, there's a more immediate concern for Democrats. If Brown pulls an upset and defeats Coakley, the Democrats will lose their 60 seat filibuster-proof coalition in the Senate, which could severely threaten their chances of passing a health care reform bill to hand to President Barack Obama for his signature.

A non-partisan poll released this past weekend by The Boston Globe indicated that Coakley held a 15 point advantage over Brown, but other partisan surveys suggested the race was closer.

Brown is hoping to become the first Massachusetts Republican to win a U.S. Senate seat since 1972. Independent Joseph Kennedy, a third party candidate who is not related to the late senator, is also in the race.

The 77-year-old Kennedy, who died of brain cancer in August, was the fourth-longest serving senator in American history. Democrat Paul Kirk, a long time adviser and friend to Kennedy, is serving as his interim replacement.

As the clock ticks towards Election Day, the big question is will all these new ads flooding the airwaves make a difference?

"The Massachusetts media markets are going to be an echo chamber through next Tuesday. It's going to be hard for any one commercial to break through," says Tracey. "There may not be enough time for these ads to work."