

# **Sacramento Television Coverage of the November 2006 General Election**



**A Public Interest-Public Airways  
Community Project**

**By  
The Sacramento Media Group**

**November 2007**

# Sacramento Television Coverage of the November 2006 General Election

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## Executive Summary

In the fall of 2006, the Sacramento Media Group (SMG) – an association of concerned citizens including members of California Common Cause, the League of Women Voters Sacramento, local public access cable television station Access Sacramento, and other community members – joined a national coalition asking television broadcasters to provide more substantive coverage of the year’s midterm general elections. Coalition partners were the Campaign Legal Center, the Benton Foundation, and Common Cause. In a letter sent to stations across the country, they reminded broadcasters of their responsibilities as primary sources of election information for voters, urged them to make a commitment to the public discourse around these political campaigns, and offered resources to improve coverage.

SMG joined a similar national campaign in 2004, when the Public Interest Public Airwaves Coalition (PIPA) called upon broadcasters across the country to air two hours per week of locally produced election coverage in prime time (5:30 to 11 p.m.) during the six weeks prior to Election Day 2004. In both 2004 and 2006, SMG focused on stations that produce local news shows broadcast in the greater Sacramento region: Channels 3 (KCRA-NBC), 10 (KXTV-ABC), 13 (KQVR-CBS), 19 (KUVS-Univision), and 40 (KTXL-Fox). In 2004 only one station, Channel 13, refused to meet with SMG members. The other four met with SMG and outlined their election coverage plans. However, no station agreed to the PIPA standards. The results of SMG's 2004 efforts are summarized in *Sacramento Television Coverage of the November 2004 General Election* (see appendix).

Only one Sacramento station, Channel 3 (NBC), met PIAC standards for election-related coverage during final month of the 2006 campaign.

In 2006, SMG contacted the same five stations and asked for meetings to discuss election coverage – a critical part of broadcasters' mandated obligation to serve the public interest. Given the stations' feedback in 2004 that PIPA standards were unrealistic, SMG proposed a minimal standard of five minutes per night of candidate-centered, election-issue discourse for the 30 days preceding the election, a standard developed in 1998 by the bipartisan Presidential Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters (PIAC).

Unfortunately, two of the five stations, Channels 10 and 19, refused to meet with SMG representatives or provide summaries of their plans for election coverage. This was particularly noteworthy given the fact that 2006 was a year in which all California television broadcasters were to apply for re-license by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which requires stations to invite public comment on their activities. Yet the two stations denied community members from SMG an opportunity to exchange views. Nor did SMG receive any written response regarding the stations' plans for election programming after two letters and two e-mail requests asking for a summary of such plans.

The lack of response from Channels 10 and 19 was especially disappointing since the stations had cooperated with SMG's effort in 2004 and received

Sacramento  
broadcasters received  
an estimated \$32  
million from election-  
related advertising in  
2006, compared to  
\$12 million in 2004.

written questions in advance of SMG's appeal for visits in 2006. Neither channel gave any reason for denying the requests.

This report summarizes SMG's activities and information collected from all five local television stations that broadcast to the greater Sacramento region during the 2006 general election cycle. Members of SMG visited with three stations in early fall to

discuss election coverage plans, reviewed each of the five station's public files after the November election, and estimated political advertising revenues. In addition, SMG participated in a local television election news monitoring investigation conducted by California State University, Sacramento.

### **Key Findings**

- *Only one Sacramento station, Channel 3, met the minimum PIAC standard of five minutes per night of election-related coverage during the 30 days before Election Day on Nov. 7, 2006.* Reasons cited for such slim coverage included the high cost of producing original local programming, the need to compete with such sources as cable television and the Internet for viewers, and a large geographic broadcast area with numerous local issues and candidates.
- Based on a local television news study by California State University,

Sacramento, the race for governor received the most coverage, 34 percent, though the race was not considered to be competitive during the final month.\* Only 13.8 percent of coverage focused on congressional races and a mere 1.6 percent on state legislative races.

- Public files at all stations were of limited use in evaluating how well the stations were meeting their FCC mandated public interest obligations. The number of viewer e-mails and letters collected in the files was noticeably greater than those reviewed in 2004. However, most comments were reactions to changes in programming schedules, station personnel or format, new television technology such as high-definition TV, or part of a campaign reacting to the airing of a particular nationally televised program. *Among the hundreds of comments reviewed in files for 2006, the year of FCC re-license application for California stations, there was only a handful that commented on issues related to license renewal.*
- *During the period from September through Election Day, the five local broadcasters received an estimated total of \$32 million in revenues from election-related political advertising. Advertising rates - dependent on type of race (candidate vs. initiative), time of day, type of program, and viewing audience - ranged as high as \$10,000 for a single spot.*

Less than 2% of election coverage focused on state legislative races.

**The Sacramento Media Group intends to work with the public, media activists and broadcasters to:**

- Encourage local broadcasters to go beyond the PIAC minimum and provide more locally produced public affairs programming throughout the year, at least half of it during prime time.
- Continue to monitor Sacramento broadcast television stations' performance against recognized national public interest standards for candidate and issue coverage.
- Monitor station revenues generated by political advertising during election cycles and advocate that some portion be directed toward locally produced candidate and issue news coverage.

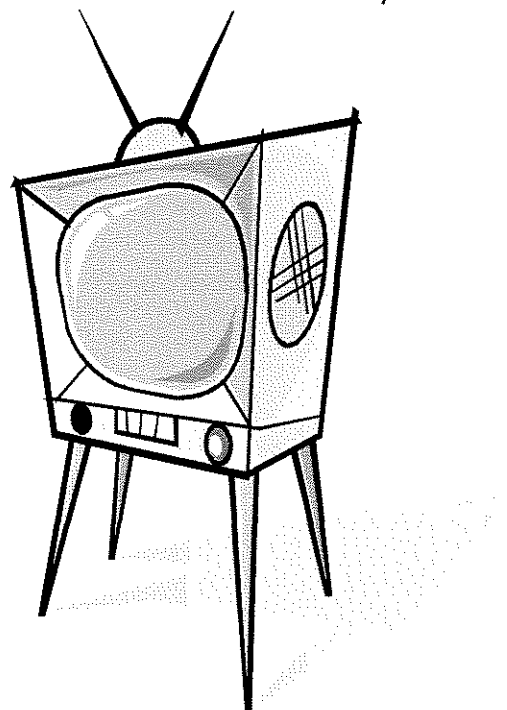
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\* *California Election Survey*. Rasmussen Reports, Oct 2006; [www.rasmussenreports.com](http://www.rasmussenreports.com).

- Monitor local news programs to record whether stations are covering important events in a nonpartisan manner.
- Support an FCC proposal\* to require stations to put public files online. Such an action would provide increased access for communities to review broadcasters' performance, including their public interest obligations, public affairs programming, and political advertising revenues. It would also increase opportunities for the public to provide feedback and assist stations in their ascertainment of community needs and interests.
- Continue to inform the community about proposed state and federal media related legislation consequential to public interest and consumer advocacy.

**SMG calls on the Federal Communications Commission to:**

- Develop and approve measurable, public interest standards that are sensitive to First Amendment information rights but serve the vital need to sustain public discourse and inform citizens about their democracy.
- Expand guidelines regarding the type of information that must be collected in station public files and how it must be presented for public view, including the placement of political advertising revenues on station websites with amounts listed by client, candidate, and ballot measure.
- Develop regulations (and/or support legislation) that replicate a Fairness Doctrine so citizens have increased access to more diverse information and balanced points of view.




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\* *Martin to Stations: Put Public Records Online*. Broadcasting & Cable, April 16, 2007, Reed Business Information. See appendix.

# Background

Since the first radio broadcasts in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the airwave spectrum has been viewed as the property of the American people, not the broadcast industry nor its corporate parents. In the Communications Act of 1934, broadcast media were mandated to serve the "public interest, convenience or necessity" because they were seen as vital in sustaining a democratic society.

With their capacity to educate and inform large numbers of citizens, the media were then, and are now, critical to the electoral process. They play a significant role in helping citizens to make informed decisions about candidates and laws that affect their lives, communities, and the nation as a whole.

Since the 1980s, however, public interest obligations of broadcasters have withered, and local news production, public affairs, and election issue coverage have suffered.

Both the quality and quantity of campaign reporting has deteriorated since broadcasters ended their voluntary code of conduct in 1981.

- In 1981 broadcasters abandoned their voluntary code of conduct, which had established programming and advertising standards through industry self-regulation.
- The same year the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) created a "postcard renewal process," throwing aside a more detailed review of whether broadcasters are meeting their obligations.
- In 1984 the FCC eliminated the ascertainment requirements whereby broadcasters had to reach out to the public, determine community needs, address those needs through programming, and defend those choices in their license renewal process.
- In 1987 the FCC repealed provisions of the Fairness Doctrine, which required broadcasters to provide reasonable opportunities for contrasting and dissenting views on controversial topics.
- In 1996 Congress passed a telecommunications deregulation bill that allowed further ownership consolidation in radio and television markets.

- In 2003 the FCC eliminated a range of protections, allowing a single company to own eight radio stations, three television stations, the only daily newspaper, the dominant cable TV provider, and the largest Internet Service Provider in a single community. The ruling was later overturned by a federal court but ownership consolidation is under consideration again by the FCC.\*

As a result, both the quality and quantity of reporting on candidates and election-related issues has deteriorated. For example, fewer than one of

Television remains the No. 1 news source for voters, yet in 2004, 11 major markets saw less than 5% of all coverage focused on statewide races.

every five network evening news stories about the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004 examined the candidates' stances or voting records, according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs. Only 17 percent of stories investigated the candidates' voting records, proposals or positions, while 71 percent of the stories focused on poll numbers or behind-the-scenes tactics.\*

In another analysis of the 2004 elections, a survey of news broadcasts in 11 major markets, researchers found that eight times more coverage went to accidental injuries and 12 times more to sports and weather than to coverage of all local races combined. *Less than 5 percent of all news coverage focused on local and statewide ballot initiatives, despite the fact that research shows local television remains the number one news source for most voters.*†



This paltry coverage of local candidates and issues stems from the disappearance of locally owned stations due to ramped up concentration of media ownership by large

\* *The Public Interest Standards in Television Broadcasting*. The Benton Foundation. 2006. <http://www.benton.org/pioguide/publicstandard.html>

\* *ElectionWatch Report of Campaign 2004*, "Network News Focus: Fluff, Flubs – Not Functional." Center for Media and Public Affairs. Feb. 9, 2004.

† *Local News Coverage of the 2004 Campaigns, An Analysis of Nightly Broadcasts in 11 Markets*. The Lear Center, Project of the USC Annenberg School and the University of Wisconsin.



corporations. *A taxpayer-funded study by the FCC's own researchers concluded that, on average, corporate-owned broadcasters aired 5.5 fewer minutes of local news per half-hour newscast, or about 20 percent less, than their locally owned counterparts.*<sup>‡</sup>

The Project for Excellence in Journalism, affiliated with the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, found that, while there were more media outlets than ever, they were covering less news. More coverage did not mean greater diversity of voices, the annual review of American journalism said, and consuming news continuously did not mean being better informed.<sup>ⓧ</sup>

Local news production, public affairs, and election issue coverage have suffered despite broadcasters' free license to profit from their commercial use of public airwaves, and claims that ownership consolidation would provide an array of information sources. In fact, erosion of media consumer protections has opened the door to industry control of what is seen, heard, and read with almost complete disregard for what communities want and a thriving democracy needs.

The FCC's own research shows that corporate-owned broadcasters air 20% less local news than their locally owned counterparts.

Because of this, public interest organizations, consumer advocates, and individuals, alarmed by a vanishing public discourse, continue to press for media reform. Concerned citizens of the Sacramento Media Group (SMG) advocated for stronger public interest efforts on the part of the region's television broadcasters by joining national campaigns in 2004 and 2006 to urge broadcasters to provide more substantial coverage of national, state, and local elections.

In 2006 the Campaign Legal Center, Benton Foundation and Common Cause sent a letter to television stations across the country. In it they reminded broadcasters of their responsibilities as the primary source of election information for voters and offered resources to improve coverage. SMG also sent a letter in September 2006 to five Sacramento television stations –

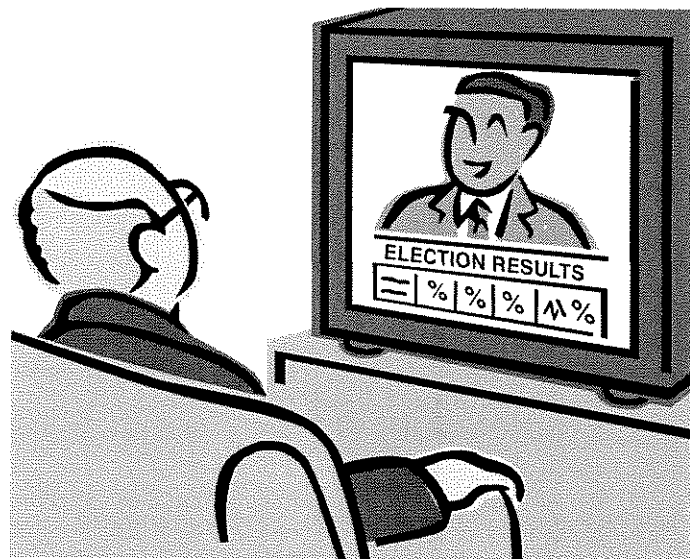
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‡ *Do Local Owners Deliver More Localism? Some Evidence from Local Broadcast News.* Federal Communications Commission Working Paper, June 17, 2004.

ⓧ *The State of the News Media 2006.* Project for Excellence in Journalism.  
<http://www.stateofthemediamedia.org/2006>.

Channels 3, 10, 13, 19, and 40 – requesting meetings with station management and asking that each station provide a few more minutes of locally produced, prime-time coverage during the weeks prior to the November election. (See appendix.)

This report summarizes SMG's activities, including information and data collected from all five local television stations that broadcast to the greater Sacramento region during the 2006 general election cycle. Members of SMG visited with Sacramento stations in early autumn to discuss election coverage plans, and after the November election reviewed each station's public interest files and estimated political advertising revenues. In addition, SMG participated in a local television news monitoring investigation sponsored by California State University, Sacramento.



# Sacramento Media Group Goals and Activities

## SMG Goals

- Urge stations to meet the national benchmark set by the bipartisan Presidential Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters (PIAC), a minimum of 5 minutes of candidate-focused, election-issue discussion per evening newscast for 30 days preceding an election.
- Analyze and report stations' performance against above standard.
- Analyze and report on content in station public files, files required by the FCC, including revenues from political advertising during the 2006 election cycle.
- Participate in a local television news monitoring investigation sponsored by California State University, Sacramento.

## SMG Activities

### I. Interviews with Station Management

Station meetings continue to be valuable and provide increased understanding about issues broadcasters confront in the news media marketplace. Based upon station management feedback from SMG's 2004 visits, in 2006 each

SMG investigated Sacramento TV station election coverage in 2004 and 2006.

station was provided with the same series of questions about their public service responsibilities and plans for election coverage. By asking each station to respond to the same inquiry, SMG hoped to provide a "fair and balanced" approach to the exchange, not favoring any particular station. The questions also constituted the "script" for conducting in-person visits with general managers

and news directors with the following objectives in mind:

- Identify each station's election coverage plans and how they addressed both their public awareness responsibilities and the necessity to remain competitive with other local stations.



- Set a “benchmark” of minimum coverage for local stations to achieve to determine whether progress is being made, the PIAC minimum of five minutes of candidate and election centered discourse each evening.
  - Gain a clearer understanding of each station’s stance on their responsibility for content accuracy in political ads.
  - Solicit more detail on the use of Internet-based station website content to address election and public interest needs, specifically on plans to reach underserved audiences.
  - Acknowledge the challenges faced by local stations in providing local election coverage, particularly in light of the last SMG report that documented station managers’ concern about the problem of candidates refusing free, local media coverage.
- Challenge the stations to think creatively about the future of high definition television and digitized broadcasting, specifically this new capacity to program multiple channels in addition to the current and familiar channel opportunities.

Questions presented to each station were developed by SMG members and California Common Cause. The following list was submitted to each station:

1. Does your station have plans to offer any special election coverage?
2. The bipartisan Presidential Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters (PIAC) recommended five minutes per night of candidate-centered discourse. Does your station have any plans to meet this standard?
3. Does your station plan to start an "Ad Watch" or "Fact Check" feature on the news to give citizens accurate information about confusing or untrue political advertising?

In 2006, Channels 10 and 19 refused both to meet and to provide written summaries of election coverage.

4. Outline your use of website technologies for greater political discourse, particularly reaching out to youth, other-than-English-speaking citizens, and other groups with limited involvement in the election process so critical to our democracy.
5. The Sacramento Media Group and California Common Cause must retain objectivity reviewing the election process and political coverage by our local media. With this in mind, do you have any suggested ways we might help you secure greater candidate participation?
6. With the advance of digital broadcasting, do you plan to use your digital channel capacity to offer enhanced political coverage? What are your plans for 2008? ([www.digitaltelevision.com/law/law199.shtml](http://www.digitaltelevision.com/law/law199.shtml))
7. Other plans for November, 2006 election coverage? Concluding thoughts?

SMG met with management of Channels 3 KCRA (NBC), 13 KOVR (CBS) and 40 KTXL (Fox). Station visits were requested multiple times from Channels 19 (Univision) and 10 KXTV (ABC), but were refused.

### **Channel 3 KCRA (Owner: Hearst-Argyle)**

Channel 3 General Manager Elliott Troshinsky and News Director Dan Weiser cited the fact that Hearst-Argyle has won many awards for political and public affairs coverage. In fact, the company reminds station management they have a corporate responsibility to provide local coverage of elections.

Only Channel 3 met national standards by reserving 10 minutes every weekday for election-related programming.

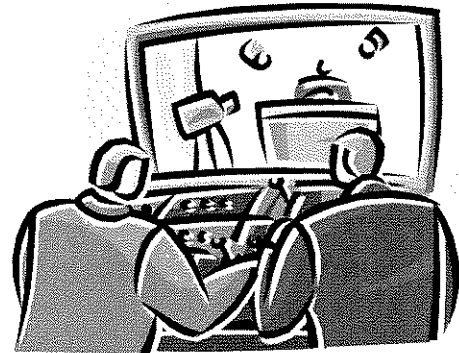
For the month prior to the 2006 general election, Channel 3 reserved 10 minutes a day, Monday through Friday, for programming related to the election. Five minutes was included in prime time news, with another five minutes on the morning news. Topics included candidate profiles and mini-debates, direct candidate quotes, explanation of ballot measures, an hour-long debate on the tax measure supporting a Sacramento sports arena, the gubernatorial debate, the debate between candidates in the fourth congressional district, and election return coverage.

In addition, evening news co-anchors used an "Ad Watch" segment to analyze political advertising that may have been misleading or that reflected

a close candidate race. Channel 3 offered to sponsor the gubernatorial candidates' debate but production was handled by others. The station did broadcast the event live.

The station also carried candidate and issue information on its website and station executives viewed Internet content as a growth area. Audience studies, they mentioned, show television use peaking before 10 a.m. and again around 6 p.m., before and after people go to work. In between, website usage peaks from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. as people log on at work. More viewers, often younger, "stream" noon news on the web.

Channel 3 posted additional sound clips on its website from candidates. This may be important especially for those who don't speak English and for younger people. The station is looking into providing news on their website in different languages, particularly to meet the needs of those in the community who speak several Asian languages.



The station is partnering with the Sacramento Area Council of Governments to broadcast town hall meetings meant to educate the public on transportation issues. The station chooses to do more extensive coverage because it sees television as the primary source of news and information for residents of the region.

The station acknowledged it hadn't yet figured out a model for using the digital channels the FCC mandates by 2009. If the majority of homes don't have digital receiver equipment, stations can't afford to program for the relatively few that do. In addition, cable and satellite companies still refuse to carry the new channels, which could provide an opportunity to provide local coverage, but not until many more homes receive the digital signal.

### **Channel 13 KOVR (Owner: Viacom)**

Channel 13 General Manager Bruno Cohen, News Director Brent Baader, and Vice-President of News Steve Charlier explained that the station planned to cover all returns on Election Day, but saw pre-election coverage as a major challenge. They expressed concern that candidates too often use news interviews to make pronouncements they felt were unrealistic. For example,

gubernatorial candidate Phil Angelides stated he planned to bring home the California National Guard from Iraq and they questioned whether the station should cover this as news because the statement seemed, in their view, unrealistic.

The station's main focus for election information was its website, which posted information on most candidates and their positions on important local issues with links to other information. In future elections, the station plans to add a video component with, for example, the candidate giving his or her stump speech.

Channel 13 used its website for most election information.

A major frustration was the lack of cooperation from candidates, who often refused to participate in an unscripted interview, preferring to make "canned," predictable statements. The station would welcome SMG help with finding candidates to detail their positions on the station's website and with submitting story ideas to the news director. In addition, the broadcast area includes most of Northern California making "local coverage" very difficult.

The station did not carry any kind of political advertising critique. Managers said that if an ad were blatantly bad, rival campaigns would address it. They also expressed concerns about fairness when a station selects ads to focus on for criticism. They suggested consumer group researchers could review ads and make suggestions.



Channel 13 is investing in Internet expansion and growth. Its new website included a complete compilation of candidates running for office, with each one answering questions regarding local issues.

Gathering detailed information from all local races throughout Northern California is a major undertaking. The station plans to monitor how viewers use political information from the website and feedback will determine future directions.

The station offers Spanish translation on some web pages, targets younger viewers, and hopes to use the website to increase the television audience as well. Channel 13 is also looking for newsworthy videos from viewers who have the ability to post on the website.

Regarding digital television, Channel 13 said there aren't enough digital receivers currently in use to make digital channels economically feasible. There are a number of possibilities for the use of this additional bandwidth, such as using the space to send better signals. For the time being, the Internet is available and inexpensive to program and expand. The station sees web content as the "rising star."

### **Channel 40 KTXL (Owner: Tribune Broadcasting)**

Channel 40 General Manager Audrey Farrington and News Director Tom Burke outlined the station's coverage plans prior to the election. They included broadcasting the gubernatorial candidates' debate on Sunday morning using tape delayed technology (garnering a one percent audience share compared with seven percent when it was shown live on Saturday) and offering five minutes of free prime time coverage for governor and senate candidates. However, since only one gubernatorial candidate accepted, no coverage was slated.



The station also produced two one-half hour shows on local Arena Tax measures Q and R; encouraged voter turnout with public service announcements on voting; highlighted random election-related comments

Channel 40 maintained candidates turn down free coverage opportunities because they prefer to control their messages.

from the audience on its *Viewer's Voice* program; worked with Asian/Pacific Island communities to cover their election issues event; and offered links to other election-related information on its website.

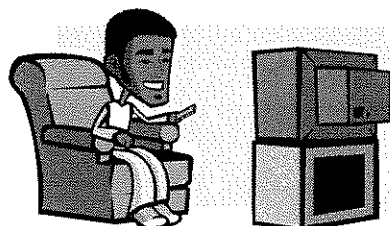
The station did not offer five minutes per night of candidate-centered coverage, called for by PIAC. Station executives said too often the candidates turn down opportunities for free time because they prefer to control the message rather than cooperate with television stations and news teams. Nor did the station offer any critiques of political advertising. Station managers said resources are too limited to do so.

While Channel 40's website isn't as developed as the general manager would



like, she saw the Internet as a good resource for in-depth coverage and links to other sites. This is planned for the future.

Channel 40 felt there are many ways to serve the public, programming being just one of them, donations to the community another. In addition, they believe their news staff is very active and creative in bringing people's perspectives to newscasts. The general manager sees Channel 40's 10 p.m. newscast as a blotter of the day's events that reflects the interest levels of viewers. By listening to the *Viewer's Voice* (a one-half hour weekly news



program) and the monthly *Our Town* forums, Channel 40 knows what viewers are interested in. But the greatest ongoing challenge is coverage of 16 counties and determining whose "local" issues should be covered.

Since there is no FCC mandate for cable and satellite systems to carry soon-to-come digital channels, Channel 40 had no plans to develop special or new programming for these additional channels. Managers said they must use their resources wisely to compete.

## SMG Commentary

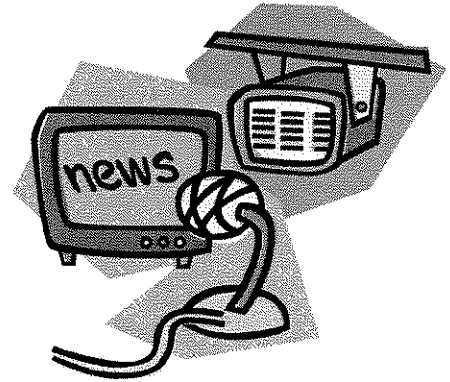
A key difference in SMG's 2004 and 2006 investigations was the benchmark used to measure television broadcast performance in providing viewers with candidate and issue information in the weeks preceding elections. In 2004, SMG introduced Sacramento area broadcasters to the standards proposed by a national coalition – two hours per week of locally produced election coverage aired in prime time during the six weeks preceding the election. Broadcaster feedback indicated the standard was unrealistic and led SMG to a more modest measure – five minutes of candidate and issue focused discussion per evening newscast during the 30 days preceding an election, advocated by the bipartisan Presidential Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters (PIAC).

Even with this lower standard, only Channel 3 met the target for pre-election coverage. Other stations either refused to discuss their coverage (Channels 10 and 19) or justified fewer

Stations justify their lack of coverage by citing cost, the region's geographic reach, and candidates who refuse interviews.

programming minutes by citing a variety of reasons: cost, the region's wide ranging geography, viewers' lack of interest, the station's involvement in non-broadcast community activities that could substitute for more robust election coverage (Channels 13 and 40), and enhanced website information. None offered research that supported their reasoning.

With no comprehensive regulatory standard for election or public interest programming, broadcasters use free airwaves with vague, unenforceable obligations to address community needs and inform viewers. The quantity and quality of news and information vital to sustaining an informed electorate and democratic practices are left to the prerogatives of corporate enterprise. SMG strongly urges the FCC to undertake further research in order to understand and outline more clearly how the nation's broadcasters can and should meet the information needs of viewers and voters.



## **II. Review of Station Public Files**

According to the FCC a broadcast television station's required public file is a means for the public to record its views on station activities and a method for the broadcaster to document activities that reflect its obligation to serve the public interest.

SMG's 2004 report summarized its initial review of public files collected by Sacramento Channels 3, 10, 19, and 40. This year, SMG continued its inspection with a look at stations' 2006 public files, which included viewer comment in letters and e-mails, program lists that summarized each station's most significant treatment of community issues, and the political section of the file containing data on political advertising revenue.

### **Political Advertising Revenues**

SMG reviewed data in each station's files on revenues received for political advertising during the period from June through Election Day on November 7, 2006. Channels 3, 10, 13, 19, and 40 received an estimated total of \$32 million for advertising from candidates for governor, lieutenant governor, insurance commissioner, other statewide offices, Congress, United States

"...Stations have an obligation to serve their local community's needs and interests and to comply with certain programming and other rules. Because we [FCC] do not monitor a station's programming, viewers and listeners are a vital source of information about the programming and possible rule violations. The documents in each station's public inspection file have information about the station that can assist the public in this important role... We [FCC] encourage a continuing dialogue between broadcasters and members of the public to ensure that stations meet their obligations and remain responsive to the needs of the local community."

*-The Public and Broadcasting. Federal Communications Commission, 1999*

Senate, state Senate and Assembly offices, and ballot measures. Approximately 65 percent of revenues were from ballot measure campaigns, 11 of which were statewide and four of which were local.

Advertising rates varied widely from a low of \$150 to a high of \$10,000 for a 30-second spot, depending on time of day, type of program, audience size, and audience demographics. For the Sacramento-Stockton-Modesto television market area, the revenues represent the following estimated values:

- Approximately \$11 per capita.
- Approximately \$22 per registered voter.
- Approximately \$40 per November 2006 election vote.

These figures reveal significantly more spending during the 2006 campaign cycle than in 2004, when the SMG analysis indicated approximately \$4 per capita, \$8 per registered voter, and \$11 per general election vote.

Given an estimated cost of \$10,000 to \$25,000 to produce a 30-60 minute program that would feature candidates or electoral issues, stations could finance such programs if they were to set aside even a modest percentage of their political

advertising revenues.

## Viewer Comments

Reviews of all five station files for 2006 showed that documents were in order and contained viewer comments, both e-mails and letters. The quantity of comments ranged from hundreds in the files of Channels 3, 13, and 40 to a couple of dozen in the files of Channels 10 and 19. Copies of station responses to community comment or inquiry were found in the files of Channels 3, 13, and 40.

Ad rates range as high as \$10,000 for a 30-second spot.

Overall, there appeared to be more comments collected in 2006 than observed when compiling the SMG report from 2004. Files included many more e-mail contacts with some seemingly engineered by organized campaigns of one sort or another in response to national network programming.

Campaign advertising rose drastically from 2004 to 2006; per capita spending went from \$4 to \$11 with 65% of all revenues coming from ballot measure campaigns.

Viewer communications overwhelmingly reflected reactions to changes in programming schedules, station broadcast personalities or format; new television technology such as high definition; or opposition to the airing of a particular network series or program. There were some comments in each station's file applauding coverage on a community issue or concern. Several others were concerned about balance in news and more public affairs coverage.

Worth noting is the fact that 2006 was the year for FCC re-license application for all California stations, and only a handful of comments related to this license renewal process were found.

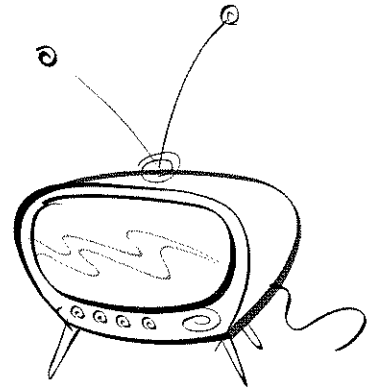
### **Listings of Significant Community Interest Programming**

All stations retained lists of programming in topic areas, such as education, arts and culture, crime, health, diversity, families, government, and business, they identified as meeting community interest needs. Most stations also included notations on occurrences of non-broadcast support for community education and local charity events, and, in the case of Channel 19, for its help to increase participation of Latinos in the electoral process.

Channel 3 identified many more public affairs programs than did other stations.

In some cases, it was difficult to understand from the list how a program or locally produced story met public interest obligations (e.g., where to fish and hunt). Some stations included national network programs in listings that were to reflect their most significant treatment of community issues. Channel 13, for example, included episodes of the series *48 Hours* with crime stories from Michigan and Florida. One station listed the same story under more than one topic area.

In terms of airtime and number of stories stations identified as significant to public interest, Channel 3 totaled many more than those of other stations. Time spent on election related topics and issues also appeared greater than that provided to viewers by other stations



### **Commentary**

Despite the vigor with which some stations maintained their viewer comment files and listed treatment of community issues, the documents were found to be of limited use in evaluating how well stations are meeting a public interest obligation. While not discounting Channel 3's accomplishments, and commendable dedication of resources to significant community issue programming by all stations, there is no regulatory measuring stick by which to gauge successful compliance.

During the year when all California broadcast stations were required to reapply for their eight-year license from the FCC, there was only a whisper in viewer comment regarding quality, quantity, viewpoint diversity, or the

How does a community ensure that its view of candidates and issues is not completely shaped by well-funded political advertisers?

general state of the broadcast public square. Yet, if there had been greater expressed concern about local programming and public affairs coverage, would it have made a difference?

Fundamental challenges remain: How do a community and its broadcasters better assure that public dialogue is fostered and invigorated by public interest programming

that is balanced and diverse? And how does a community ensure that vital information about candidates and issues is not completely shaped by well-funded political advertisers?

### **III. Local TV News Monitoring Project**

Political science students at California State University, Sacramento, under the direction of professor Kimberly Nalder, recorded and analyzed 171 half-hour local news broadcasts at multiple times of day during the month

preceding the November 2006 General Election. The sample includes broadcasts from Channels 3, 10, 13, and 19 in Sacramento.

The average number of political advertisements per half hour was 7.4; the average number of election-related stories per half hour was 1.4. A plurality of the election stories, 34 percent, involved the governor's race, even though the race was not viewed as competitive during the final month.\* The next largest number of stories, 17.8 percent, focused on state and local initiatives. Only 13.8 percent of the stories focused on congressional races, and a mere 1.6 percent on state legislative races. Down-ballot state and local races received virtually no news coverage.

Viewers of local TV news received far more information from advertising than from news sources, 7.4 ads to 1.4 news stories per half-hour newscast.

By far the most common political advertising focused on initiatives, at 51.5 percent of the total sampled. Other ads covered statewide races (17.2 percent), congressional races (10.2 percent), the governor's race (7.9 percent), and state legislative races (6.5 percent).

34% of stories focused on the less-competitive governor's race, while only 13.8% covered Congressional races and a mere 1.6% covered state legislative

Admittedly, this is only a sampling of the news broadcasts preceding the election, but there is no reason to believe more extensive sampling would change these general patterns. Viewers of local television news received far more information from advertising than from news stories, and

more information on the gubernatorial race than on many other races and important ballot initiatives.

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\* *California Election Survey*. Rasmussen Reports, Oct 2006; [www.rasmussenreports.com](http://www.rasmussenreports.com).

# Summary

Only one of the Sacramento stations, Channel 3, met the minimum benchmark set by the Presidential Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters (PIAC), which advocates a minimum of five minutes of candidate and issue-centered coverage every evening during the 30 days prior to the election.

## Station management maintained that:

- The PIAC benchmark was either unrealistic or irrelevant, given the Sacramento region's broadcasting landscape and media marketplace.
- The number of local election issues is difficult to cover due to the broad viewing region that broadcasts reach.
- Stations compete with cable television and other news sources for audience share; broadcast television is subject to more FCC regulations than cable television.
- Stations increasingly develop and promote their own websites as "go to" resources for more information on subjects they cover on-air.
- Political candidates regularly refuse station invitations for interviews and debates.
- Public input is welcomed and read by stations.

Only Channel 3 met the national standard of at least five minutes of election-related coverage every evening for 30 days prior to the election.

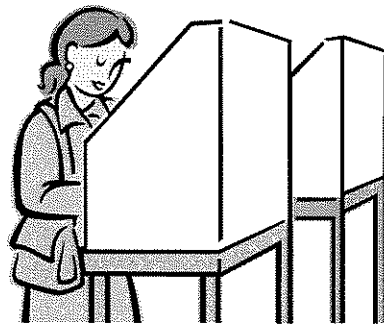
## SMG observed that:

- Public input is welcomed and read by stations.
- Stations visited were open to inquiry and input from the SMG team. However, two out of five local broadcasters (Channels 10 and 19) were not willing to meet with SMG members or provide a written summary of their pre-election programming.



Moving election information to station websites ignores voters without computer access, and replaces news gathering with candidate postings.

- Public files were well ordered and accessible upon request, with station staff helpful at most turns. However, the files were not as useful as they could be to ascertain whether a station is fulfilling its public interest obligations and responding to significant community needs and issues. The FCC does not provide guidelines against which to measure content of station public files.
- Station websites can be useful in presenting election and campaign information, but they also have important implications. These include questions about the limited service of the Internet by voters without computers or computer skills, and the data-driven nature of the Internet, with candidate or campaign postings replacing journalistic news gathering and programming.



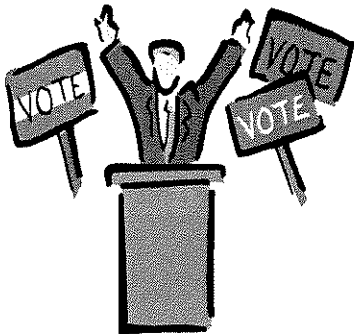


# Recommendations

The federal government has allowed corporate media and its television broadcasters to use the powerful reach of the public airwaves – estimated to be worth billions of dollars – free of charge. A vigorous democracy requires that broadcasters, in return, serve the public interest with programming that informs and encourages Americans to take an active role in shaping the future of their families and their nation. SMG is confident that local broadcasters will respond, as they have indicated, if the public uses this project to invigorate viewer communication and involvement with local television stations as they cover news and issues significant to the greater Sacramento region.

## **SMG intends to work with the public, media activists, and broadcasters to:**

- Encourage local broadcasters to go beyond the PIAC minimum and provide more locally produced public affairs programming throughout the year, at least half of it during prime time.



- Continue to monitor Sacramento broadcast television stations' performance against recognized national public interest standards for candidate and issue coverage.
- Monitor station revenues generated by political advertising during election cycles and advocate that some portion be directed toward locally produced candidate and issue news coverage.
- Monitor local news programs to record whether stations are covering important events in a nonpartisan manner.
- Support an FCC proposal\* to require stations to make public files available online. Such an action would provide better access for communities to review broadcasters' performance including their public interest obligations, public affairs programming, and political advertising revenues. It would also increase opportunities for the public to provide

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\* *Martin to Stations: Put Public Records Online.* Broadcasting & Cable, 4/16/2007, Reed Business Information. See appendix.

feedback and assist stations in their ascertainment of community needs and interests.

- Continue to inform the community about proposed state and federal media-related legislation consequential to public

Americans recently demonstrated they care very much about the health of democracy and their country's "public square" by sending more than two million messages to the FCC and Congress in opposition to further media ownership consolidation. SMG joins other media and consumer advocacy organizations in working to render more forceful public interest performance standards for broadcasters.

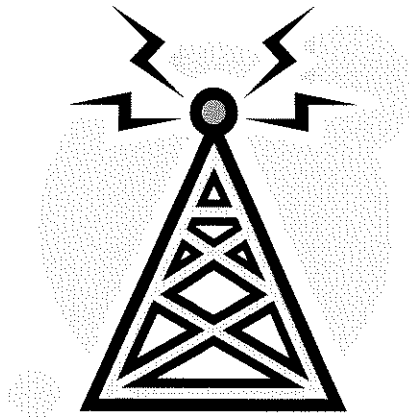
**SMG therefore calls on the FCC to do the following:**

- Develop and approve measurable public interest standards, sensitive to First Amendment information rights but serve the vital need to sustain public discourse and inform citizens about their democracy.
- Expand guidelines regarding the type of information that must be collected in station public files and how it must be presented for public view, including the placement of political advertising revenues on station websites with amounts listed by client, candidate, and ballot measure.
- Develop regulations (and/or support legislation) that replicate a Fairness Doctrine so citizens have increased access to more diverse information and balanced points of view.



# Appendix

Letter sent by national campaign to local television broadcasters  
SMG questions sent to local television broadcasters  
Response letters received from local television broadcasters  
SMG testimony submitted to FCC  
Sacramento broadcaster contact information



May 26, 2006

Dear Broadcaster:

As you know, local broadcast stations are the primary source of election information for voters. With the 2006 midterm elections upcoming, we are writing to strongly urge you and your station to give high priority to providing coverage of these elections and to finding innovative and significant ways to provide candidates access to the airwaves so they can speak directly to the voters. We encourage you and your station to make a public commitment to do your part to further the public discourse around these political campaigns.

Our organizations have compiled a number of resources to help broadcasters better serve the public during this election season. We encourage you to visit the links listed below for more information:

The Campaign Legal Center's guidebook entitled *Beyond the Spin: Practical Ideas for Engaging Candidates & Viewers in Campaign 2006*, is designed to provide your producers and reporters with some ideas on the variety of ways to offer candidates airtime and help engage and educate your viewers about the upcoming elections.

The Benton Foundation's *Citizens Guide to the Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters*, which provides useful information on the public interest expectations of digital broadcasters.

Common Cause works on a variety of issues relating to media reform, and is a member of the *Media and Democracy Coalition*. The Coalition's Bill of Media Rights has been signed by organizations representing more than 40 million Americans.

Finally, the Legal Center's *Campaign Media Guide*, is a comprehensive primer on the legal requirements surrounding political broadcasting, helping both candidates and broadcasters navigate the election season.

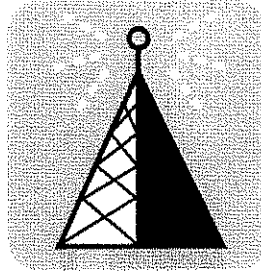
We are convinced that television journalists, if given support from management, have the ability and creativity to show your audience the truly interesting and compelling issues that are a part of our nation's elections at all levels of government. But making candidates, campaigns and elections more compelling television means avoiding the easy way out - it means going beyond coverage that focuses predominantly on the horseshoe aspects of elections, or on short sound bites that don't allow voters to get meaningful information about candidates' views and positions. We believe, with a strong commitment from the top, your station can move beyond some of the more ineffective national traditions of campaign coverage to create new, more dynamic and engaging programming about the 2006 elections. Without a presidential race there will be more opportunity to focus on state and local issues, which as the local licensee, your station has a special responsibility.

The National Association of Broadcasters recently sent out a questionnaire asking about your station's planned activities for the 2006 elections (*The Election 2006 Station Debate Tracker and Log of Voter Education Activities*). We also encourage you to get a copy of *Election 2006*, also released by the NAB, which seeks to facilitate broadcasters' involvement in elections. If you have not already received this guidebook, [click here to request a free copy](#).

We believe that broadcasters are uniquely positioned to provide outstanding service with their election coverage. We also believe it is a critical part of their licensee obligations. Our organizations would appreciate knowing about your plans for campaign coverage. We will recognize those stations that are meeting their commitment as public trustees to serve their communities by providing substantial and informative election coverage. We look forward to seeing your station on that list.

Sincerely,

Benton Foundation, Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause



**Sacramento Media Group**  
**Affiliated with California Common Cause**  
**2006 Election Coverage by Sacramento Commercial Television Stations**

- (a) Does your station have plans to offer any special election coverage?
- (b) The Gore Commission recommended five minutes per night of candidate centered discourse. Does your station have any plans to meet this standard? ([www.digitaltelevision.com/law/law199.shtml](http://www.digitaltelevision.com/law/law199.shtml))
- (c) The Sacramento Media Group and California Common Cause must retain objectivity reviewing the election process and political coverage by our local media. With this in mind, do you have any suggested ways we might help you secure greater candidate participation?
- (d) With the advance of digital broadcasting, do you plan to use your digital channel capacity to offer enhanced political coverage? What are your plans for 2008?
- (e) Outline your use of web site technologies for greater political discourse particularly reaching out to youth, other-than-English-speaking citizens and other groups with limited involvement in the election process so critical to our democracy.
- (f) Does your station plan to start an "Ad Watch" or "Fact Check" feature on the news to give citizens accurate information about confusing or untrue political advertising?
- (g) Other plans for November, 2006 election coverage? Concluding thoughts?

JoAnn Fuller  
Associate Director  
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1005 12th St. Suite C  
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January 16, 2007

JoAnn Fuller  
Associate Director  
California Common Cause  
1005 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite C  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Fuller,

Thank you for the opportunity to outline KCRA 3's commitment to political coverage for the 2006 election year.

That commitment is comprehensive. It is produced locally, but is part of a national commitment by our parent company, Hearst-Argyle Television.

We have been honored for our political coverage by the prestigious USC Annenberg Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in television political journalism. In fact, our company has received the award three consecutive times.

In 2006 the Hearst-Argyle stations went even further in our commitment by increasing the "time" promised and by making greater use of our websites.

At KCRA 3, we increased our Monday through Friday time commitment to a minimum of 10-minutes per day spanning all newscasts. We believe that allowed us to reach even more viewers than before, particularly our early morning audience. In addition to our on-air expansion, we greatly increased our content and commitment on the internet.

Specific on-air and on-line initiatives included:

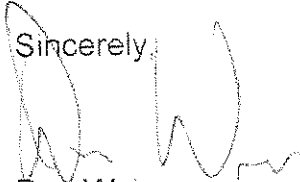
- Extensive candidate profiles.
- "Pure" sound from candidates.
- Explanations of various ballot initiatives to try to help viewers understand the issues.
- "Adwatch" reports to help viewers sort the truth from fiction in broadcast commercials.
- Extended interviews and mini-debates during our 6:30pm newscast.
- KCRA 3 broadcast a one-hour live audience debate on the issue of a sales tax hike to finance a downtown sports arena.
- We aired the debate between the two major candidates for Governor.
- We streamed on the internet a debate between candidates in the 4<sup>th</sup> Congressional district.

- On the internet web users were able to view and vote on the effectiveness of political commercials. We posted additional excerpts of speeches and interviews. And, we added stories exclusive to our website.
- On election night KCRA 3 was the only local station to carry wall-to-wall coverage of election returns.

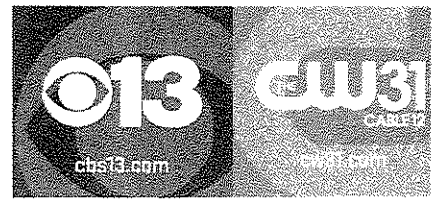
Walter Cronkite said "there is no better way to strengthen American democracy than to help citizens understand what is at stake in political campaigns".

At Hearst-Argyle and at KCRA 3 we are committed to doing that everyday.

Sincerely,



Dan Weiser  
News Director



## CBS13.com/CW31.com November Election Issue Coverage

In an effort to help local voters understand the issues in the 2006 General Election, we at CBS13.com/CW31.com provided several online resources. First, we created a voters guide where voters could compare 543 candidates from 189 northern California and statewide races side-by-side based on their qualifications and their stand on key race issues. We also provided a place where visitors could compare the propositions side-by-side. Once voters decided on which proposition or candidate they favored, they could indicate their choices in the online form which they could print and take with them when they vote.

Here's the link to our Voter Guide which can still be accessed:

<http://www.vgt2004.org/a-kovr-kmax/pre/indcx.go>

Another way we educated voters on the issues was to stream the gubernatorial debate at Sac State University live on our website. We also provided hyperlinks to the county election websites for each of the 16 counties served by CBS13. Some of these websites provided in-depth information relating to measures and races in their areas.

Our Voters Guide had 135,614 page views.

CBS 13 / CW 31  
2713 KOVR Drive  
West Sacramento  
California 95605

916.374.1313





kxl-tv / ktd-dt sacramento fox40 website

4655 Fruitridge Road  
Sacramento, CA 95820-5299  
(916) 454-4422

March 12, 2007

Ms. JoAnne Fuller  
Associate Director  
California Common Cause  
1005 12th St. Suite C  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Fuller:

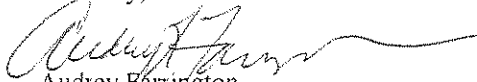
I am writing at your request to recap our meeting last year with representatives from the Sacramento Media Group providing an overview of our coverage related to the 2006 election. These include:

- Free airtime offer of 5 minute primetime interviews to major candidates in U.S. Senate and Gubernatorial races made in both the primary and general Election. Candidates were advised that the interviews would be shared with our stations in Los Angeles and San Diego to extend their reach. Only Phil Angelides accepted this offer and only for the General Election.
- Carriage of the California League of Conservation Voters debate on Saturday, May 6, 2006 at 12N between Phil Angelides and Steve Westley.
- Carriage of the California Broadcaster's Association Gubernatorial Debate on Sunday 10/8/06 8-9AM.
- Offer to carry *any* debate between U.S. Senate candidates Feinstein and Mountjoy.
- 30-minute In-Focus program devoted to the Sacramento Arena issue on Saturdays October 14, 2006 and November 4, 2006 at 1130AM.
- News stories and coverage during our newscasts, FOX40 News at 10 and FOX40 Morning News.
- Website page with links to election resources, organizations and candidates and proposition information.

KTXL FOX40's public service initiatives are not limited to the political season. We regularly engage and inform viewers on local issues through our on-going program entitled "The Viewer's Voice" which provides a means for viewers to engage in the process, sharing their perspectives and questions with us, their representatives and the audience. We have highlighted issues and concerns in different communities during our monthly, "Your Town" live broadcasts from various locales. We meet regularly with community organizations to ascertain community needs, and we have helped raise more than \$7-million dollars in seven years for local non-profits and schools through our Helping Hand Fund and One For The Community partnerships. In 2006 we granted more than \$600K to local organizations through the Helping Hand Fund and helped raise more than \$800K through the One For The Community initiative for local schools and non-profit organizations.

We believe these and other varied community initiatives demonstrate our obligation to serve the public interest. We hope that organizations such as yours will continue to encourage candidates to participate in open debates whose costs and carriage can be shared by all media instead of granting exclusivity to a particular media outlet with limited audience. We also encourage candidates to take advantage of free time offers when made available. KTXL FOX40 remains committed to serving the public interest in ways that are meaningful and relevant to our audience. We welcome your continued input and feedback.

Sincerely,

  
Audrey Farrington  
VP / General Manager  
KTXL FOX40

Sacramento Media Group Testimony  
Federal Communications Commission Hearing  
Oakland, California October 27, 2006

Honorable Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to address media reform issues which are so vital to the functioning of our democracy.

Let us begin by citing three facts:

1) In the 1980s the FCC dissolved a fairness doctrine and weakened public interest standards, allowing the corporate "free market" to ensure diversity and balance. Recent studies show that diversity and balance have been critically threatened by FCC deregulation.

2) In 2003, the FCC received over three million public comments, of which more than 99 percent opposed further media consolidation. Yet the FCC ignored the clear voice of the public! It took Congress and a court challenge to get the FCC to back down from more efforts to relax ownership rules.

3) In 2004, a research report, commissioned by the FCC was suppressed because it revealed greater concentration of media ownership would hurt local TV news. This conclusion was at odds with FCC arguments made when it voted to increase the number of television stations one company could own in a single market.

Common Cause has taken a leadership role in media reform efforts in recent years, including participation in the national *Public Interest, Public Airwaves* campaign in 2004. Thousands of Common Cause members have opposed the loosening of ownership rules because they strongly believe we need information from diverse, competitive and independent sources to ensure the health of our democracy. Further concentration of ownership will not further this fundamental purpose.

As an affiliate of California Common Cause, the Sacramento Media Group (SMG) has continued to actively promote media reform. In 2004 SMG organized a public forum to debate the question: "Should Radio Stations, TV Broadcasters and Newspapers Be Owned by the Same Corporation?" The event was co-sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Politics and the Media, based at California State University at Sacramento. In 2006, SMG continued its collaboration with the Institute by organizing a CSUS event titled, "How Do We Engage Voters? Television Coverage of the Upcoming 2006 Election."

In 2005, SMG released a report (attached) documenting its meetings with local television station managers. It found that television broadcasters in the Sacramento region fell far short of Common Cause goals for informing local voters on the candidates and issues prior to the 2004 elections— despite the fact these stations earned nearly \$12 million in political advertising revenues during that same election period.

This year SMG met again with local broadcasters to discuss their plans for coverage prior to the November 2006 election. The group continued urge stations to increase substantive issue and candidate coverage. Only NBC affiliate KCRA, owned by Hearst Argyle, is giving as much as five minutes per day of locally produced election issue coverage. One station manager, Russell Postell of ABC's KXTV owned by Gannett, refused to meet with SMG, community members with diverse backgrounds and active with the League of Women Voters, Common Cause and the Sacramento community media center.

Broadcaster visits are being supplemented with outreach to the public and many people have written to local television stations asking for more substantive public affairs coverage. In addition, this year SMG, in partnership the Institute for the Study of Politics and the Media at CSUS, is monitoring local television news election coverage and plans to publish findings.

In all our work, we find the public extremely concerned about local television broadcasters doing more to make local public affairs and news programming available. What we conclude from meetings with television station managers is that until the FCC requires more public affairs programming, it will not be provided. What we know from research and the public experience, increased monopoly of media does not serve our local communities, where still most people seek news and information. We ask that the FCC mandate guidelines for extensive, fair, locally produced programs covering public affairs, especially during election cycles. In order for this to happen, we maintain that ownership of information media must not be concentrated, but instead must encourage diversity and responsiveness to the needs of local communities.

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**Contact information for Sacramento Television Stations,  
Sacramento Media Group**

**KCRA, Channel 3**

President and General Manager Elliott Troshinsky  
Contact Mr. Troshinsky at [etroshinsky@hearst.com](mailto:etroshinsky@hearst.com)  
Or write KCRA 3 Television Circle Sacramento, CA 95814-0794  
Network: NBC  
Owner: Hearst Argyle Television Inc.

**KXTV, Channel 10**

President and General Manager Russell Postell  
Contact Mr. Postell at [rpostell@news10.net](mailto:rpostell@news10.net)  
Or write KXTV PO Box 10 Sacramento, CA 95812-0010  
Network: ABC  
Owner: Gannett Broadcasting

**KOVR, Channel 13**

General Manager Bruno Cohen  
Contact Mr. Cohen at [bcohen@kmax.com](mailto:bcohen@kmax.com)  
Or write KOVR 2713 Kovr Dr. West Sacramento, CA 95605-1600  
Network: CBS  
Owner: Viacom Television Stations Group

**KUVS, Channel 19**

General Manager Steve Stuck  
Contact Mr. Stuck at [sstuck@univision.net](mailto:ssluck@univision.net)  
Or write KUVS 1710 Arden Way Sacramento, CA 95815  
Network: Univision  
Owner: Univision Communication Inc.

**KTXL, Channel 40**

Vice President and General Manager Audrey Farrington  
Contact Ms. Farrington at [AFarrington@tribune.com](mailto:AFarrington@tribune.com)  
Or write KTXL 4655 Fruitridge Rd. Sacramento, CA 95820  
Network: Fox Broadcasting Company  
Owner: Tribune Broadcasting Company

To contact the **Sacramento Media Group** and to request copies of our reports:  
[smg@commoncause.org](mailto:smg@commoncause.org) or 916 443 1792 extension 11 (JoAnn Fuller)

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