

A Case Study

Defeat of statewide constitutional amendment -- The Sugar Tax

One of the most challenging and successful recent campaign projects was our effort on behalf of Florida Sugar Farmers to defeat a billion dollar tax proposed as a constitutional amendment. As part of a national campaign organization brought together for this statewide effort, we were responsible for media relations, community organization and outreach. We established a statewide news bureau, speakers bureau provided speakers and debaters for talk radio and television. We developed and placed print advertising and collateral materials and organized grassroots rallies. When we began, the polls showed us behind by as much as 30 points. On election day we won 54% to 46%.

Some of the Campaign's Highlights

Speakers Bureau

We developed a message, a slide show, collateral materials, and trained over 40 volunteers. We developed a data base of over 500 organizations. We delivered our message to 200 local economic, business, condominium and home-owners groups, civic clubs, Farm Bureau meetings, political party gathering and other public forums.

Radio and Television

Our volunteer representatives appeared on nearly 200 local radio and television programs, and we continuously debated the opposition at every major political forum in the state.

Grassroots organization

By using a grassroots approach, we were able to recruit audience members and other organizations to distribute a variety of collateral materials from their homes, businesses churches, unions and chambers of commerce. Additionally, we identified existing opportunities to get the message out by getting retirees and relatives of industry employees, living in other parts of Florida, to join in the effort by distributing materials or providing us with contacts for local organizations.

News Bureau

We sought and publicized endorsements from local labor, religious, community, governmental, industry, farming and political organizations, client vendors and individuals. By investing the time and energy to meet with and educate all of these entities, we were able to communicate our message and establish relationships that enabled us to coordinate over 75 special media events. Individuals that we met with agreed to appear at press conferences, on television and radio interviews, and at political rallies. It was at these events that we were able to convey to the public that we did not stand alone in our beliefs and that local political, business and religious leaders supported us.

Editorial Board Meetings / Media Briefings

With regard to other non-paid media efforts, we were extremely aggressive in educating every key reporter and editor on every daily and weekly newspaper and every radio and television news producer in the state. From building these relationships across the state,

over 70 positive op-ed pieces, letters to the editor and / or editorials appeared between January and November 1996. We also won the editorial endorsement of every major newspaper in South Florida, the region where the tax would have been imposed.

Local Paid Media / Endorsements

In addition to paid advertising in the major media markets, our local grassroots efforts, gave us the opportunity to meet and advertise with the small community newspapers and newsletters across the state. All of our efforts in the speakers bureau and editorial board meeting process gained us the endorsement of over 90 organizations.

Conclusion

By identifying a compelling message and taking it to virtually every corner of the state the tide of public opinion was shifted in less than one year. It was a team effort in coalition building, educating and persuading community leaders, extensive and aggressive media contact and the ability to shape a message and counter negative publicity that ultimately won the day.