

Sept. 18, 2002

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TO THE POINT: Do New York TV stations shortchange New Jersey voters? Rutgers' Eagleton Institute of Politics study analyzes Garden State's 2001 election coverage

NEW BRUNSWICK/PISCATAWAY, N.J. – The 2002 Senate race in New Jersey between incumbent Robert Torricelli and Republican challenger Douglas Forrester is shaping up as one of the most competitive in the country, with the potential to decide which party will control the U.S. Senate. But how much will voters learn about the candidates and issues by watching news broadcasts on New York television?

During the 2001 gubernatorial campaign, New Jersey candidates placed 40 percent of the campaign ads seen during news programming on WABC, WCBS and WNBC television stations in New York City. But fewer than one-in-five of the stations' election news stories (about 17 percent) focused on the campaign. New Jersey viewers comprise about 30 percent of the media market served by network affiliates located in Manhattan.

These statistics come to light in a new study conducted jointly by the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and the Washington, D.C.-based Alliance for Better Campaigns. The research also found that 70 percent of news stories focused mainly on campaign strategy, rather than on the candidates and their issues.

"When New Jersey voters want to know about the candidates and their campaigns, will New York television give them lots of ads but little campaign news as they did in the 2001 governor's race?" asks Ingrid W. Reed, director of the New Jersey Project, which focuses on the state's political and government issues, and encourages citizen participation in the state.

"We are releasing the results of our study as the 2002 campaign season gets underway to encourage stations with large audiences in our state to provide more coverage of candidates in New Jersey races, especially since the candidates must use these out-of-state stations to reach voters with their ads. We also want to raise awareness of the importance of television news coverage of political campaigns to inform voters."

The study included all local evening newscasts on New York City's network affiliated stations for the 30 days before the Nov. 4, 2001 election. Highlights of the of 2001 news programming study of New York televisions WABC, WNBC and WCBS showed:

The three stations devoted a total of about eight hours (489 minutes) to campaign coverage of the major races – New York City mayoralty and New Jersey gubernatorial – in the 30 days before the election.

The New Jersey gubernatorial campaign was the focus of only 86 minutes (17 percent) of the 489 minutes of election news coverage. New Jersey viewers make up about a third of the New York television market.

Only 2.5 of the more than eight hours campaign news programming focused on the candidates and their issues while the other 5.5 hours were devoted to "horse race" and campaign strategy stories.

The study also looked at political ads shown during the news programming:

The amount of political advertising time during evening newscasts (442 minutes) was nearly equal to the amount of time devoted to election news coverage (489 minutes). (See details of these results here.)

New Jersey candidates placed 40 percent of all political ads (adding up to nearly three hours of ads), but only 17

percent of the news coverage was devoted to the New Jersey race.

The research collaboration between the Eagleton Institute of Politics and the Alliance for Better Campaigns taped news programs on WABC (Ch. 7), WCBS (Ch. 2), and WNBC (Ch. 4) between 5 pm and 11:30 p.m., for 30 days before the Nov. 4 election. The analysis of the programming was based on the research protocols developed by the Alliance and the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication.

The protocols were used to monitor the extent to which local television stations complied with the recommendation that stations provide five minutes of "candidate-centered discourse" per night for the month preceding elections.

The recommendation, known as the "5/30 standard," came from a commission comprising leaders from the broadcast industry and public interest groups that met in 1998.

This year, the Alliance for Better Campaigns is conducting a study of 552 television stations in the top 100 media markets, which include New York City (ranked No. 1) and Philadelphia (No. 4), from Labor Day to Election Day to look at the number and cost of political ads and how much time news coverage is focused on candidates themselves and their issues. Beginning Sept. 16, the information will be released every two weeks.