



**Campaign Finance Reform Blast #10**  
**February 2016**

## **A WIN FOR VOTERS**

A step forward in the disclosure of funding of political ads was announced January 28 by the FCC.

In a unanimous vote, the FCC requires all but the smallest (1,000 or fewer cable subscribers) cable, satellite and radio stations to upload their political files online. Broadcast TV stations have been required to upload their records of political ad buys since 2014.

These files contain source information about the ads such as costs and when the ads are run. In some cases the information provides the only public disclosure of donors to groups generally known as non-profit social welfare organizations. Until this decision, radio, satellite and cable providers were required only to make their files available to physical view, necessitating a trip to the provider's headquarters and asking to see the paper file.

When these files are available online, they can reveal who is buying ads, the firms making the buys and how much is being spent. The projected expenditures on political ads on cable TV alone is \$1.5 billion in 2016. This ruling significantly increases transparency on a huge, previously dark area of political spending.

More remains to be done, however, since the uploaded files are not required to be machine readable, or use a standard format, leaving the information largely inaccessible to average voters. Note that The Sunlight Foundation offers a tool, [Political Ad Sleuth](#), to search and sort the files. But the FCC's January 28 ruling is a step toward transparency for political ads, providing vital information about who is seeking to influence our elections.

The League of Women Voters® is a non-partisan political organization encouraging informed and active participation in government. The League influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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