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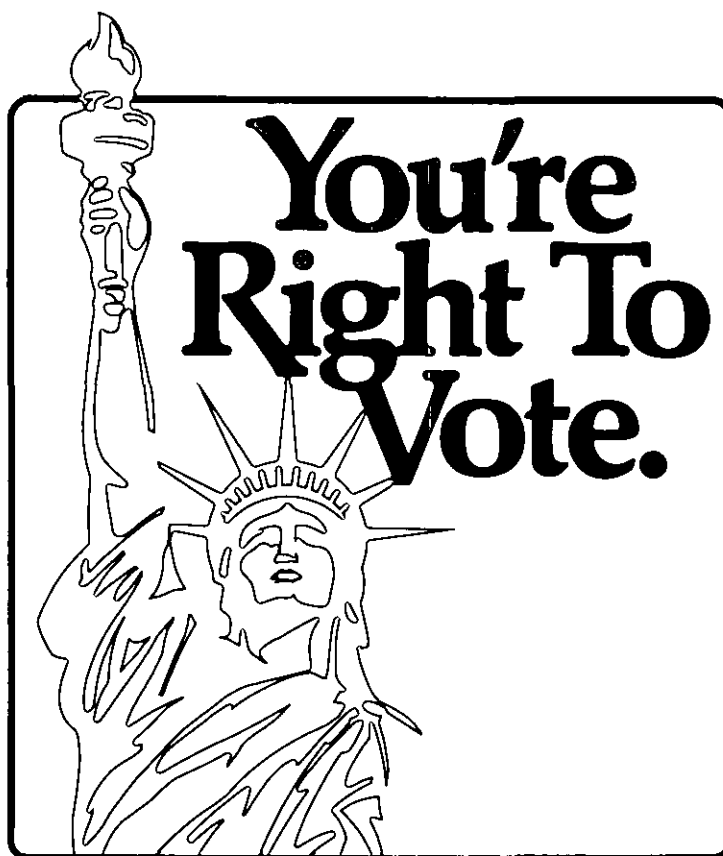
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NYS BOARD OF ELECTIONS VOTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

1988 EVALUATION



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1988 New York State Board of Elections Voter Outreach Program signals a renewed commitment to strengthening the democratic process through increased voter participation.

The public information and motivation program delivered multiple versions of radio, television and newspaper announcements, posters, Spanish-language materials, registration display boxes and other printed materials.

The lion's share of budget -- over \$300,000 -- went toward the purchase of radio and television time, with equal levels of exposure across the state. An ambitious and carefully organized strategy for the contribution of radio and television public service announcements paid off, delivering over \$400,000 in documented PSA value.

The "You're Right to Vote" theme and use of an "800" telephone hotline were institutionalized. Over 1,900,000 new registrations were received in 1988, with a net gain of 765,000 after cancellations and purges.

New York's 1988 turnout level remained stable compared to 1984 while turnout across the nation was down, and New York went from sixth place in turnout rank to second place among states with ten or more electoral votes.

It is our belief that the evaluation contained herein will serve as a crucial link in the development of ongoing voter outreach programs for the citizens of New York State.

I. BACKGROUND & HISTORY

"In a democracy, there is no more important civic responsibility than participation by the citizenry in the electoral process."

With these words, the State of New York 1988 Task Force on Encouraging Electoral Participation began its examination of the troubling decline in voter registration and participation.

Reliable estimates indicate that the percentage of eligible Americans who vote has declined from 80% in 1930 to 35% in 1986. The national trend is reflected in New York State, where a study of the 1984 general election ranked New York 37th out of 50 states and the District of Columbia in voter turnout.

To counteract this alarming trend, the governor and legislature of the State of New York initiated the first state-sponsored voter education program in 1987. A \$100,000 appropriation was approved for a pilot program designed to identify methods of educating citizens in registration and voting procedures and deadlines, and encouraging them to vote.

Verno Associates, a Rochester, NY-based communications agency specializing in public affairs communications, was selected as media consultant to the 1987 program.

Working closely together, State Board of Elections Commissioners, Board staff specialists, and representatives from Verno Associates developed the basic components for a long-range public information campaign. The 1987 pilot program successfully:

- Established a statewide voter education theme (You're Right to Vote).

- Established the Statue of Liberty as the graphic symbol of the program.

- Explored methods of utilizing the 800-VOTER-88 hotline number in the New York City media market and the 800-FOR-VOTE hotline number upstate.

- Developed a model for maximizing the contribution of public service announcements from radio and television stations.

- Established the principle of equal distribution of paid radio and television announcements to insure that citizens in each part of the state were exposed to paid messages in the same proportions.

II. THE 1988 PROGRAM

The Challenge

The 1988 Request for Proposals clearly identified the single most compelling problem of voter participation in New York State: 6.6 million unregistered but eligible New Yorkers. The positive results of the 1987 program were the building blocks for the 1988 program, and a research report made available through Governor Cuomo's Task Force on Encouraging Electoral Participation.

A. Research

In February of 1988, the Governor's Task Force issued its report. Using a combination of polling, public hearings, focus group sessions, and an intensive study of existing research and laws governing the electoral process, the Task Force brought depth and direction to the strategic discussions regarding the Board of Elections Voter Education Program. Among the relevant considerations the Task Force established:

- Many people do not register because they think the registration process is too cumbersome, not because they don't care about or believe in the democratic process.

- Some of the disincentives to registration and voting are lack of information, the "hassle" factor, confusion regarding deadlines, restrictions imposed by deadlines.
- 40% of Americans move every 2 years. There is a real need to target this group for registration.

Among other things, the Task Force recommended:

- An all-purpose informational brochure be produced.
- Public information campaigns target audiences that historically have been under represented at the polls.
- Public information be targeted somewhat towards people who have moved.
- The message challenge people's commitment to their civic ideals as a motivator.
- Public information strategies be sensitive to cultural nuances.

B. Objectives

Goals for the 1988 program were defined based on research and the 1987 experience in 2 categories:

1. Quantitative Goals

- Reach more people (increase PSA-to-paid ratios).
- Register more voters.
- Increase turnout among registrants.

2. Program Development Goals

- Develop messages that work equally well in New York City and Upstate.
- Introduce and establish voter hotline usage as a means to register.
- Identify ways to motivate media to contribute more PSA's.

- Explore methods of increasing and balancing public service announcements contributed by radio and TV stations.

- Identify ways to motivate New York State-based corporations in contributing media time for voter education purposes.

- Make public service print advertisements available to interested newspapers, supermarkets, and other associations and organizations.

- Explore cultural differences which should be addressed in voter education messages to non-English speaking citizens.

- Explore methods of maximizing media exposure to improve production-cost-to-time-cost ratios.

- Deliver media exposure in a manner that is geographically balanced, non-partisan, and as inclusive as possible.

- Create messages that are flexible enough to accommodate various deadlines without being diluted.

C. Strategy

As creative and strategic discussion progressed, it became evident that the Voter Education Program would be best designed to send out a message to all New Yorkers -- old, young, professional, workers, disabled, minority, male, female. Themes were developed to reflect this priority of "inclusion," as well as to reflect pride in the diversity of the Empire State.

Since presidential elections always generate the highest turnout in the four-year cycle, the general strategy was to put two-thirds of the budget into registration messages, and one-third in "get out the vote" (GOTV) announcements.

The strategy recognized that local Boards of Elections have the primary responsibility for voter registration and, as such, all messages encouraged potential registrants to register through their local boards.

Taking into account the language and cultural barriers to voting faced by Spanish-speaking New Yorkers, a Spanish program component was deemed essential. Special research and production were approved for the development of Spanish-language concepts, and the production of Spanish newspaper announcements, posters and radio scripts.

The plan for stretching the budget and maximizing the impact of the campaign was to encourage public service announcements by radio and television stations, and documentation of PSA's contributed. In order to achieve maximum participation by radio and television stations, Outstanding Achievement Awards were proposed for media outlets that met or exceeded pre-set goals for public service time contributions. The program objective was to deliver 75 cents in public service time for every dollar paid in broadcast media, or a ratio of 3 to 4 for PSA time to paid media.

Finally, it was agreed that the theme introduced in 1987 -- "You're Right to Vote" -- would be institutionalized in 1988 by applying it in virtually every message and media form utilized during the 1988 program.

D. Media and Materials

1. Paid Radio and TV

The messages of the 1988 program were delivered primarily through radio and television announcements. For paid radio and TV, several considerations made it necessary to develop different versions of the same concepts.

First, all radio and television announcements were created with one version publicizing the 800-FOR-VOTE number for upstate New York, and another version publicizing the 212-VOTER-88 number for the New York City area.

Second, paid radio and TV announcements were developed for each major phase of the election cycle -- the registration period and the general election period -- with the registration phase being primarily informational and the GOTV phase being primarily motivational.

The basic elements of the paid broadcast were six 60-second radio announcements and four 30-second television announcements, all unified by common themes and concepts.

Finally, Spanish language radio was produced for the paid registration and GOTV phases of the campaign.

2. Public Service Radio and TV

Since some broadcast stations will not air a paid announcement as a public service announcement, PSA and paid versions of radio and TV spots were produced in order to maximize the possibility of PSA exposure.

Also, 60, 30, 20, 15 and 10-second television PSA's were produced to give stations maximum flexibility regarding spot length for PSA's. As in the paid broadcast production, versions of PSA broadcast media were produced for the registration and GOTV phase, as well as a separate radio announcement for the "local registration days" period.

Beginning in July, PSA radio and television announcements were delivered to media outlets across the state. Stations that were not selected for paid schedules were sent PSA dubs with requests for PSA contributions.

The initial objective of delivering 75 cents in PSA contributions for every dollar spent in paid media has been met and exceeded. Documentation to date shows that the program obtained \$1.33 in public service value for every dollar spent in paid media.

Award plaques will be delivered by the end of February to approximately 100 radio and television stations and other participating organizations that helped to achieve high levels of exposure and awareness for the program.

3. Print

Five newspaper ads were created and made available for use as PSA's. Posters, voter registration form display boxes and other print artwork were made available to interested organizations and outlets.

In addition, Spanish-language newspaper ads, posters, and radio announcements were scripted and distributed with the appropriate outlets.

E. Registration Phase Results

1. Paid Radio and TV

In keeping with the program principle of "equal paid distribution," each market received approximately the same number of gross rating points in each medium for the Registration Phase of the program. From September 6-September 16, \$132,345 was committed to paid television time, delivering approximately 3,500 gross rating points statewide with 350 GRP's in each of the ten major television markets. From September 26-October 5, \$69,910 was committed to paid radio time, delivering approximately 1,650 gross rating points statewide with 150 GRP's in each of 11 major radio markets.

2. PSA Radio and TV

The program goal was to deliver 75 cents in public service broadcast contributions for every dollar spent in paid broadcast time. For the registration phase of the program, the campaign achieved 100% of PSA attainment goals, with most markets achieving at least 150% of goal and some markets achieving over 200% of goal.

In television, where \$132,345 was spent to purchase time during the Registration Phase, \$271,000 in documented additional value was delivered in television PSA contributions.

In radio, where \$69,908 was spent to purchase radio time during the registration phase, an estimated \$66,000 in documented additional value was delivered in radio PSA contributions.

F. GOTV Phase Results

1. Paid Radio and TV

From November 4-November 8, \$67,190 was committed to paid GOTV television time, delivering approximately 1,600 gross rating points statewide with 160 GRP's in each of the ten major television markets. From November 4-November 8, \$33,825 was committed to paid radio time, delivering approximately 825 paid gross rating points statewide in five days.

2. PSA Radio and TV

To date, \$67,500 in GOTV broadcast public service announcement value has been documented by participating stations. This figure is expected to increase somewhat as documentation continues to become available. However, it is expected that the final ratio of PSA to paid value will be lower for the GOTV phase than for the Registration Phase of the program, primarily because broadcast inventory tightens up in the fall as back-to-school and political time buys crowd the airwaves.

G. Overview of Results

Every effort was made to successfully create and execute a public information and motivation program that was balanced with respect to political affiliation, geography, ethnicity and age. The announcements themselves are designed to appeal to all New Yorkers and, as such, feature a diversity of characters -- disabled, blue collar, business, young couples, senior citizens, black, white, and Hispanic.

The dollars appropriated were spent efficiently. Overall, the broadcast component of the program delivered \$404,500 in documented public service announcements against a \$303,271 paid schedule. This represents a substantial success in terms of meeting and exceeding the original goal of receiving 75 cents in PSA value for every dollar devoted to paid broadcast time. In documented PSA contributions alone, the program exceeded goal by \$177,000.

The success of the PSA program can be attributed to two factors:

1. The early summer start date for PSA time.
2. The availability of varying lengths of live and recorded PSA's.

These two factors provided stations with maximum flexibility in scheduling public service announcements and cooperating with the New York State Board of Elections in achieving media exposure goals. In addition, the variety of materials provides an inventory of flexible and durable elements that can be reused in future years.

The 1988 program attained gross rating points akin to good "commercial" drives in each major market, and serves as a model that demonstrates the effectiveness of combining a paid media budget with public service announcement media drives.

The value of combining paid with PSA schedules cannot be overstated. Without the paid schedule, the PSA delivery potential would be dramatically reduced. Without the PSA program element, the paid schedule would have delivered inadequate impact. This program approach typifies an instance where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Over 1,900,000 new registrations were received in New York State in 1988. After cancellations and purges of current registration rolls, the net gain in voters was 765,000. All 62 counties reported increases in registration, and the 1988 registration figure of 8.5 million is nearly equal to the figure which was reported in 1984 -- the third highest registration year in state history. The 57 counties outside of New York City came within 1% -- or 50,000 registrants -- of 1984, and the increase over 1987 was 9%.

Perhaps most significant is New York's turnout performance as compared with other states in 1984 and 1988. Among states with 10 or more electoral votes, New York went from 6th highest in turnout in 1984 to 2nd highest in turnout in 1988.

G. Preliminary Recommendations

New Yorkers need to be informed, motivated and facilitated if the state is going to be successful in expanding the voter outreach effort. The 1988 program has created materials and announcements needed to do the job, with funding levels adequate to deliver impact and effectiveness.

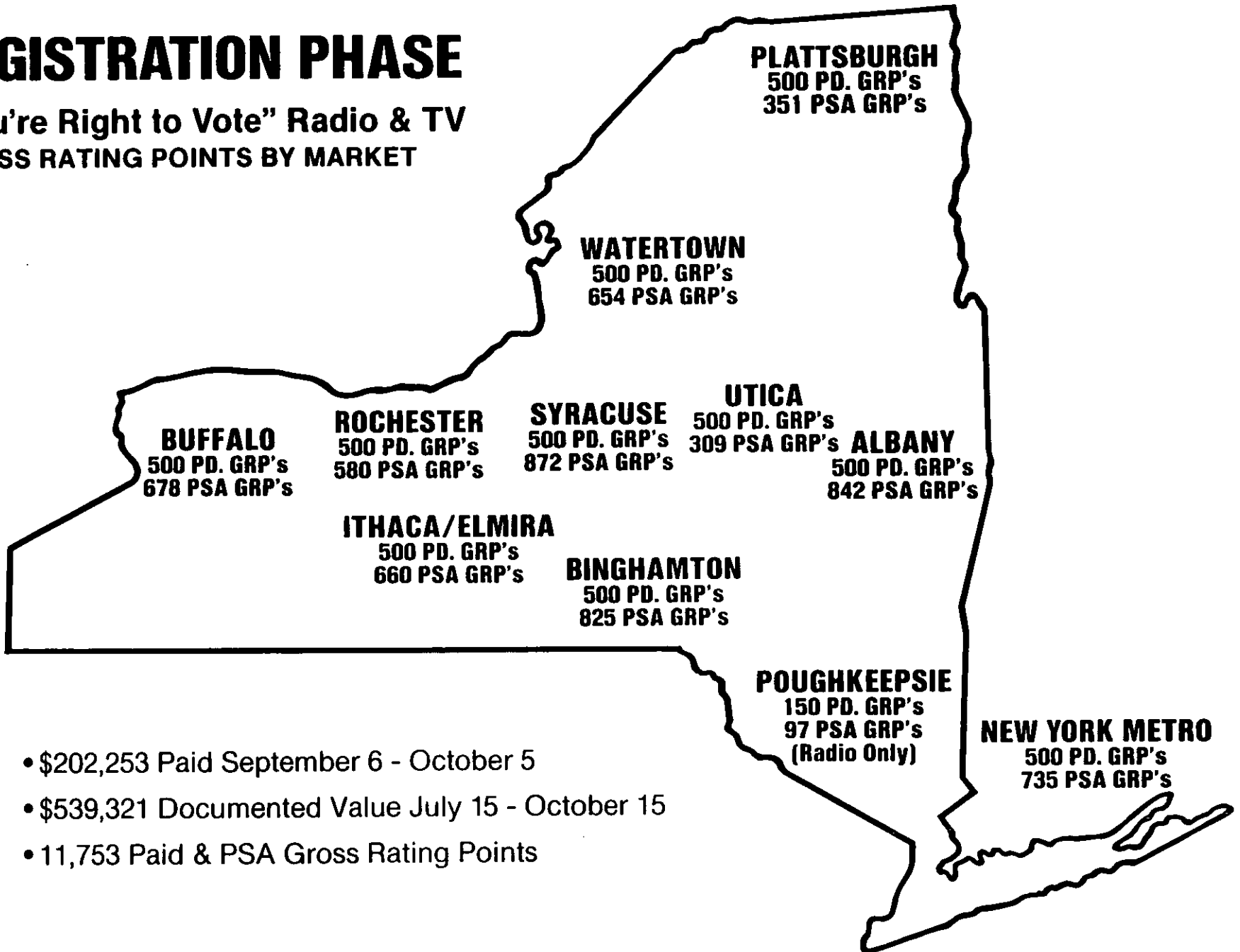
The Task Force Report cited the need for legislative action to re-establish the final date for voting closer to the general election. The current law closes out registration 30 days prior to the election. From a voter education and media perspective, it makes sense to adopt the Task Force recommendation because, just at the time most prospective voters are beginning to concentrate on the general election and are most likely to absorb information and be motivated by voter education radio and TV announcements, their opportunity to register for the general election ends.

A single "800" voter information phone number is recommended for cost saving and production efficiency purposes. The existence of one number in New York City (800-VOTER-88) and another for the rest of the state (800-FOR-VOTE) made it necessary to create two versions of every radio, television and print announcement that was produced. For certain areas of the state, a single "800" number will also preclude the possibility and added confusion of exposure to both hotline numbers at different times.

Finally, since New York shares media markets with neighboring states, the Board of Elections might wish to explore methods of cooperating with neighboring states to maximize reach and minimize the cost of voter information campaigns. This might be accomplished through a series of meetings and workshops bringing together appropriate state agency and legislative personnel, voter interest groups, board personnel, consultants, and representatives from other states.

REGISTRATION PHASE

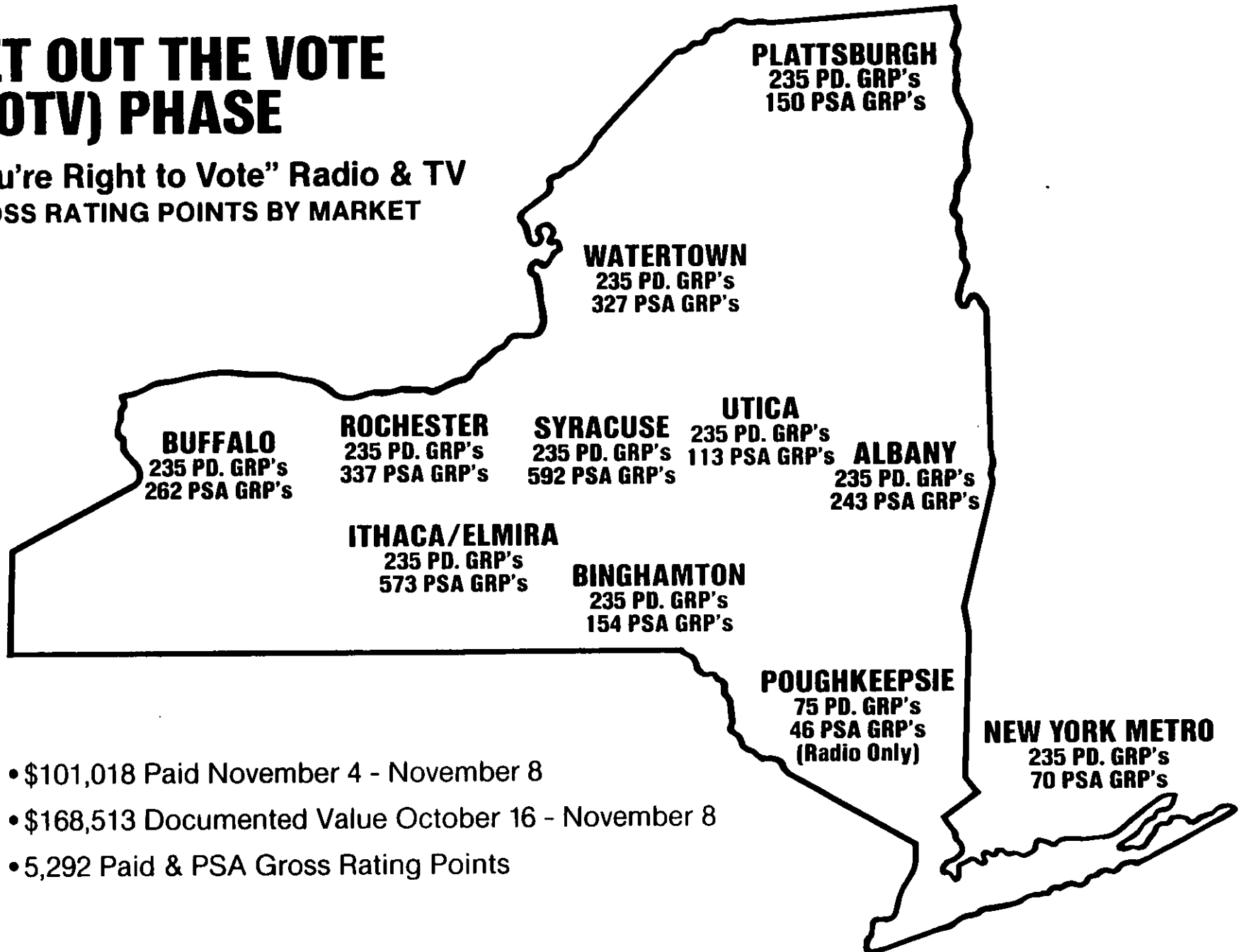
"You're Right to Vote" Radio & TV
GROSS RATING POINTS BY MARKET



- \$202,253 Paid September 6 - October 5
- \$539,321 Documented Value July 15 - October 15
- 11,753 Paid & PSA Gross Rating Points

GET OUT THE VOTE (GOTV) PHASE

“You’re Right to Vote” Radio & TV
GROSS RATING POINTS BY MARKET



- \$101,018 Paid November 4 - November 8
- \$168,513 Documented Value October 16 - November 8
- 5,292 Paid & PSA Gross Rating Points

