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TOP STORY

No Democratic opponent, but Murphy launches \$5M ad campaign before June 8 primary

Michelle Brunetti Post
May 11, 2021



Gov. Phil Murphy addresses a news conference last week in Hoboken.

Associated Press

Michelle Brunetti Post

Despite having no Democratic opponents on the ballot in the June 8 primary, look for television and digital ads from the Murphy for Governor 2021 campaign starting this week, touting his message of a “stronger and fairer” New Jersey in a post-pandemic world.

The campaign will spend almost \$5 million on media ads ahead of the primary, a spokesperson said Tuesday.

But it’s not primary voters Murphy is seeking to reach, said John Froonjian, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

“Campaigns just start earlier and earlier,” Froonjian said of the general election, in which Murphy will either face GOP frontrunner Jack Ciattarelli, a Somerset County businessman, or Linwood’s Hirsh Singh, who are battling it out in a Republican primary.

Froonjian said Murphy has received good marks from voters for handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and that by advertising early, the governor hopes to “cement that concept in voters’ minds, while the Republicans are still dealing with each other.”



Murphy gliding in NJ's primary; GOP wrestling with Trump

Ciattarelli, who has criticized Murphy's handling of the pandemic in commercials, including problems getting unemployment payments to people in a timely manner, would much prefer to be turning his attention fully to Murphy, Froonjian said.

Ciattarelli and Singh will get their media attention with two 60-minute debates later this month.

Under state law, all candidates who qualify for public matching funds must participate in at least two debates during each election. Candidates not seeking public funds who commit to raising and spending at least \$490,000 also can participate. Singh did not qualify for matching funds but says he has raised the required amount to participate.

Early this year, Murphy had already raised \$3.4 million, according to the federal Election Law Enforcement Commission, and received \$4.1 million in public matching funds.

Ciattarelli had raised nearly \$1 million and received \$3.6 million in matching funds.



Gov. Phil Murphy's approval ratings have dipped but remain high as he seeks reelection

Murphy's campaign also said Tuesday it would launch a new bilingual website to mobilize voters.

“With less than a month to go until the June 8 Democratic primary, we are ramping up a coordinated effort to communicate directly with voters,” said Murphy campaign manager Mollie Binotto.

Murphy has no Democratic challenger on the ballot in the primary. State officials ruled that two would-be challengers filed faulty petitions to get on the ballot last month.

A Monmouth University poll of 706 New Jersey adults last week showed Murphy with a 57% approval rating, down from 71% at the height of the outbreak last year, but still in positive territory. It had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

On the GOP side, Ciattarelli is the only one of the four Republicans running for governor to qualify for public matching funds. He has also received support from county Republican parties up and down the state.



Trump booster candidate for governor won't get public funds

Also seeking the GOP nomination are Hudson County pastor Phil Rizzo, who recently posted a photo of himself alongside former President Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago; Singh, a former unsuccessful gubernatorial candidate in 2017; and Brian Levine, an accountant and former Somerset County elected official. Singh also has been a vocal Trump supporter. Levine has called for the party to stop arguing over Trump and focus on reining in taxes.

The Murphy campaign's first television ad — “No Other” — focuses on his leadership throughout the pandemic, the campaign said. It specifically cites raising the minimum wage and protecting reproductive rights as accomplishments.

“No other state was tested like ours. Yet through our loss, we came together,” Murphy says to open the ad.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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MURPHY

Seth Wenig / Associated Press



ciattarelli



SINGH

VINCENT JACKSON / Staff Writer

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GOP Gubernatorial Debates

WHAT: Debates between GOP candidates for governor Jack Ciattarelli, of Somerset County, and Hirsh Singh, of Linwood.

WHEN: 7 p.m. May 25

SPONSOR: New Jersey 101.5 FM (WKXY-FM) in the station's Ewing studio. It will be broadcast live on New Jersey 101.5 with video streaming on Facebook and YouTube.

WHEN: 8 p.m. May 26

SPONSOR: NJ PBS, airing on NJ PBS television channels and at NJSpotlightNews.org.

Michelle Brunetti Post

Staff Writer

In my first job after college got paid to read the New York Times and summarize articles for an early online data base. First reporting job was with The Daily Record in Parsippany. I have also worked in nonprofits, and have been with The Press since 1990.