

## Executive Branch Agenda 2013

### **Improve the FCC's Political File Database**

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should adopt rules expanding its database of information about political advertising to include all media markets. The database should be publicly available in a structured data format and should integrate FEC identifier information. In addition, the database should identify the chief executive officers or members of the executive committee of any entity sponsoring or furnishing political ads.

#### **Background**

In April 2012, the FCC imposed a rule requiring the top four broadcasters in the biggest fifty media markets to put information from their "political files" online. The political file includes information about individuals and groups that purchase political ads on the station. Prior to the rule, political files, which are required to be public, were available only by going to a broadcaster's office to view a paper file.

The ruling puts information about political ad buys online for the first time, however, the coverage is incomplete. In the midst of the 2012 elections, one hundred sixty media markets, including many key presidential battleground states, were exempt from online disclosure. In addition, the information that was collected by the FCC was not made available in a searchable, sortable format, making it much more difficult for users to parse and analyze the data.

Little is more fundamental to the functioning of our democracy than voters' understanding of who is influencing our elections, and broadcasters have a responsibility, in exchange for use of the public spectrum, to demonstrate they are serving the needs of their community. Placing detailed information about political advertising online in a centralized FCC database is fundamental to broadcasters satisfying their responsibility.

Broadcasters profited handsomely from the \$1 billion spent by outside groups on the 2012 election but the public was left in the dark about who was behind most of the expenditures. They must be required, without exception, to make the information from their public files readily available to the public.