

## Winning Edge #43 – Pa. Budget: Statistic, Story, Solution

This is Trevor Bragdon with Commonwealth Partners' *The Winning Edge*: Tips to help conservatives persuade and win.



In the last Winning Edge, we looked at Florence Nightingale's method of using one statistic, one story, and one solution. Today, let's apply this framework to something complex: Pennsylvania's budget.

When using numbers to persuade, first ask: What's the feeling we want to create?

Let's look at this strategically. With Republicans controlling only one branch of government, we need a message that resonates beyond this budget cycle. The longer the time horizon, the simpler the message should be. That means a focus on big themes rather than line-item specifics.

### Finding the Right Statistic

Over the last five years, Pennsylvania's spending has grown dramatically. We could say, "Five years ago, Pennsylvania's budget was around \$36 billion. Today, it's \$50 billion."

That's interesting, but big numbers can be difficult for people to process. Even rounding the numbers doesn't make the change feel tangible.

Instead, we can frame it differently: "In the last five years, state spending has grown 40%, reaching \$50 billion." The number 40% is easier to recall and process. While you could be more precise on the percentage, the goal here is memorability not precision, so rounding to 40% makes it more digestible than something like 42.27%.

Some might ask, "Hasn't income also risen during that time?" This creates our opportunity for contrast: "In the last five years, state government has grown by 40%, while the average Pennsylvania voter's paycheck has barely budged."

### Turning Numbers into Story

To make these numbers resonate, we need a personal angle:

"Think back to how much money you earned in 2020. Do you make 40% more than you did then? For most Pennsylvanians, the answer is no—their paycheck has barely budged. But government spending in Pennsylvania has grown by over 40% in that time, and now we have a deficit. Government spending can't keep growing faster than Pennsylvania's economy."

### **The Solution: Taxpayer Protection Act**

This stark contrast leads naturally to a solution: The Taxpayer Protection Act—a simple reform to force the government to play by the same financial rules as the rest of us.

Why it matters:

- When spending outpaces what taxpayers can afford, the result is higher taxes, growing deficits, and an even bigger financial squeeze on working families
- The Taxpayer Protection Act sets a commonsense spending cap, tying government growth to what taxpayers can actually afford
- It forces Harrisburg to prioritize needs over wants—funding essential services while keeping spending in check

Without these protections:

- Bigger government leads to higher taxes and more debt
- Pennsylvania's economy can't grow when taxpayers are drowning in government excess
- Future tax hikes become inevitable

Complex budget issues become compelling when you focus on one clear contrast: government's 40% growth versus stagnant personal incomes. Close with this simple truth: "If the government ran like a business—or like a household—it wouldn't get away with spending more than it brings in. Let's make sure Harrisburg lives by the same rules as the rest of us."

### **Bottom Line**

Big, complex issues don't have to be confusing. Break it down with one strong statistic, one relatable story, and one clear solution—that's how you make numbers stick and actually move people to act.