

## Winning Edge #54 – The \$50B Budget that Outgrew Pa.

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



In the last 50 years, Pennsylvania's population has grown by just 10%.

But state government? It has ballooned.

In the last five years alone, the state budget has increased by over 40%.

This year, for the first time in history, Governor Shapiro's budget crosses the \$50 billion mark.

Here's the challenge: Big budget numbers are hard for most voters to wrap their heads around.

Fifty billion dollars just sounds like a lot of money.

Few people have an intuitive feel for the difference between a million and a billion. To put it in perspective, it takes one thousand millions to make a billion. That's the difference between a dime and a hundred-dollar bill. No wonder it's hard to relate.

So how do you make it stick with voters?

In [Winning Edge #4](#), we talked about three simple techniques to persuade with numbers. Here's how to apply them to this budget moment.

### 1. Add a translation sentence.

Treat unfamiliar numbers like a foreign language. Add a sentence before or after to explain what the number means.

For example:

*The Shapiro budget is over \$50 billion. To put that in perspective, that's a 40% increase in just five years.*

### 2. Round and make it concrete.

People remember round numbers. You don't need the exact budget figure. Just say it clearly:

*This is the first time Pennsylvania's budget has crossed \$50 billion.*

### 3. Make it human scale.

Translate growth into something voters can feel. Try this:

*Five years ago, the state government spent about \$3,000 per resident. Today, it's nearly \$4,000. That's an extra \$1,000 per person, without most families seeing any direct benefit.*

**Bonus:** Turn a number into a story.

Pick a single number and tell a short, memorable story about it. Ask yourself: What feeling do I want to create? Then use a number that helps tell that story of how this budget outgrew Pennsylvania. A good story can stick with a voter long after a spreadsheet full of facts is forgotten.

It's tempting to include lots of numbers in budget conversations. But voters won't remember dozens of different facts. It's far better if they remember one or two that actually matter to them.

**Bottom Line:**

Big numbers don't move people on their own. But if you round them, scale them to real life, and translate them into simple terms, you can help voters understand what's really happening and why it matters.