WINNING EDGE

$50 Billion Budget That Outgrew PA

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.**

Difference between a million and a billion?

$50 billion just sounds like a lot of money. Most people don't have a gut sense for the scale between a million and a billion.

The difference between a million and a billion is the same as the difference between a dime and a $100 bill.

How do you make numbers stick with voters?

In Winning Edge #4, we discussed three simple techniques for persuading with numbers. Here's how to apply them to this budget moment.

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.*

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.*

Make It Human Scale

Translate growth into something voters can feel.

- *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: Tell 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 PA. 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 better if they remember the one or two that matter to them

The 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.