



## **Mississippi radio group has gotten \$8 million from taxpayers**

By Steve Wilson  
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A Mississippi radio group is an all-too-frequent feeder at the state trough.

TeleSouth Communications, which owns 14 radio stations throughout the state and broadcasts the SuperTalk Mississippi network, has received \$8,229,294.45 in advertising revenue from state taxpayers since 2004, according to an analysis of records by Mississippi Watchdog. The state has spent more than \$128 million on public information campaigns on radio, TV and in print since 2003.

TeleSouth's SuperTalk network is home to two of Mississippi's local right-leaning political talk radio shows, the Gallo Radio Show and The JT Show. Gallo played a big role in the Mississippi U.S. Senate race. He scored the first interview of challenger state Sen. Chris McDaniel after a scandal broke involving a blogger who tried to photograph U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran's wife in a nursing home. Gallo's show has poked fun at McDaniel's candidacy and its tea party supporters.

"Taxpayers should not foot the bill stemming from a propaganda-infested radio show," said Justin Thornton, a Bay St. Louis resident. "Taxpayers did not agree to this. The blame rests with the Legislature who allocated and approved these funds."

State agencies use paid radio spots for everything from DUI prevention, "Drive sober or get pulled over," or to inform the public on the state's new law on youth sports concussions. They've also used them to promote agencies or advertise events. These are different than Federal Communications Commission-mandated public service announcements, where a station gives up some of its airtime for free to run the PSAs.

The gravy train almost stopped in 2012, as Senate Bill 2736 would've ended the practice of paid advertising on radio and TV from state coffers, but that bill died in committee.

"Radio stations that receive funding from the government will be biased — it's predictable," said Nicole Kaeding, a budget analyst for the Cato Institute who focuses on state and federal spending policy. "The station's likelihood is interconnected with the government. Publishing critical stories could lead to lower levels of funding jeopardizing the station's viability."

“The state of Mississippi should not be funding radio stations either directly through grants or appropriations, or indirectly through advertising.”

The state agencies that have advertised on TeleSouth include:

- Rehabilitation Services
- Agriculture
- Rehabilitation Services
- Employment Security
- Environmental Quality
- Forestry Commission
- Mississippi State Fair Commission
- Human Services
- Insurance
- Medicaid
- Secretary of State
- Transportation
- Wildlife and Fisheries

TeleSouth is getting the biggest piece of the state’s public information pie since 2004. Here are the yearly totals:

- 2014 — \$459,443.49
- 2013 — \$880,287.63
- 2012 — \$541,796.25
- 2011 — \$628,377.00
- 2010 — \$486,290.00
- 2009 — \$893,787
- 2008 — \$1,202,807.00
- 2007 — \$748,686.07
- 2006 — \$1,102,824.16
- 2005 — \$695,053.85
- 2004 — \$589,942.00

TeleSouth has crowded out its competitors for state advertising dollars. Clear Channel, which owns 13 stations in Hattiesburg, Jackson and Biloxi, has received \$218,919.25 since 2004. Clear Channel’s Memphis stations, which service much of northern Mississippi, received more than \$45,000. Capstar Radio, which owns 10 stations in the state, received \$101,804. Urban Radio, which owns eight stations in the Columbus/Starkville and Tupelo markets, received \$228,547.