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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

## BIPAC, Chamber Go to Twitter for Debate

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*Correction: The original version of this story contained a misspelling of the name of BIPAC New-Media Director Liz Shrum.*

Another debate, another hashtag.

The business group BIPAC has shelled out somewhere in the vicinity of \$130,000 for a Promoted Trend on Twitter in advance of Tuesday's presidential debate at Hofstra University. The Promoted Trend is the closest thing Twitter has to a home-page ad. It places the topic #FightForJobs at the top of user trend lists worldwide for 24 hours.

The campaign's goal is to "increase reach with citizens and get them engaged and motivated to play their part in the electoral process. Not only to vote, but to pay close attention to the issues," said BIPAC New-Media Director Liz Shrum. The campaign isn't linked to BIPAC's own Twitter presence. Instead, it's mapped to the @FightForJobs Twitter handle, a verified account that BIPAC launched in August. It now has about 19,000 followers, and Shrum is hoping that number will jump during the debate.

A lot of people will be sounding off about the debate via Twitter, but Shrum will have more visibility than most users, because of the ad buy. She'll be tweeting from the @FightForJobs account throughout the debate, and those tweets will appear at the top of the feed for users who click on BIPAC's trending topic. "I gotta be on my game," she said.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is also looking to influence the online debate with a less expensive and less visible ad buy designed to urge its followers to put questions to both candidates about how they will work on behalf of the business community. The chamber's digital strategist, Nick Schaper, explained that the business group wants to "use the community that we built to get involved." The chamber is soliciting questions for the candidates under the hashtag #Ask4Business, and then using the Promoted Tweet ad unit and keyword-based ads to get more attention for those questions. "They will be seen in Boston and Chicago," Schaper said.

The chamber is quick to point out that it's not trying to put its thumb on the scale on behalf of a particular candidate. Spokeswoman Blair Latoff said, "Regardless of who is sitting in the Oval Office, the U.S. chamber will always engage the administration to advocate on behalf of the business community."

BIPAC isn't endorsing a candidate in the presidential race, although its endorsements in House and Senate races tilt heavily Republican. The Fight For Jobs program is "firewalled from our PAC," Shrum explained.

The online audience for the debates isn't just made up of political insiders and movers. About 11 percent of the audience for the first debate watched on television while tracking coverage online, according to a report by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Only a small share of

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this “dual screen” audience of about 7.4 million shared their reactions on social media, but many more followed along.

As Schaper put it, “Twitter is starting to look more like the electorate.”

It's not clear the extent to which Twitter users can be activated or convinced by content in the social network. Twitter's sales department put out a note suggesting that exposure to political tweets is a "key driver" of political donations by users. The sales pitch appears to be resonating; Twitter has recently raised the price of the Promoted Trend ad unit.