



Name _____

Interest Groups



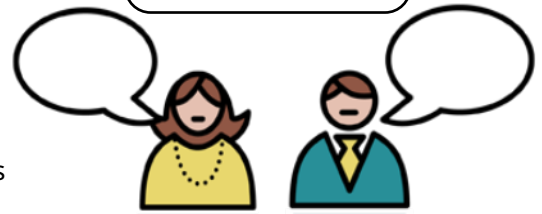
Influencing Government

Interest groups use several strategies to influence government. The amount of influence that interest groups have on government is a major issue of concern for many people today. At the same time, millions of citizens rely on interest groups to make their voices heard.

Lobbying for Support

Interest groups hire **lobbyists** to meet with members of the government and discuss the group's issues and concerns. Lobbyists say that their job is to provide information to decision makers. The information lobbyists provide has been carefully chosen to persuade the audience to take one side of an issue. Lawmakers have to be aware of the **bias** in the lobbyists' messages and consider both sides before they make any decision.

Bias: favoring one view over another.



"K Street" is commonly used to describe lobbyists in Washington, DC. Many of the major lobbying groups have offices on this street.

Endorsing Candidates

During elections, some interest groups may endorse, or officially support, candidates. Groups choose a candidate to support based on what the candidate has done in the past and where the candidate stands on issues important to the group. Once the candidate is in office, he or she may introduce new bills, support existing laws, or use influence on important committees. In return, the interest group encourages its members to vote for that person in the next election. In addition, the interest group may donate money to the candidate's election campaign.

Raising Money

Interest groups raise money to support their efforts to influence the government. Some people worry that interests groups can "buy" candidates by contributing lots of money to the candidate's election campaign. Once in office, such a candidate might be more concerned about pleasing the interest group than representing the voters. The government addresses this concern with strict rules about how interest groups may collect and donate money to political campaigns. Those that do must form a **political action committee (PAC)** that follows strict government rules about giving money to political candidates.

Not everyone agrees about what kinds of rules interest groups should have to follow. Some people fear that campaign financing laws limit the ability of people to support the causes they care about. Others fear that interest groups have grown to have more influence on government than the public at large. They believe the groups should be controlled. The debate continues as some interest groups and wealthy individuals who support them find **loopholes**, or ways around, the campaign finance laws.

Strategies for Influencing Government:

Inform the public and elected officials about issues that matter to the group.



Donate money to political campaigns in exchange for support by the candidate.

Endorse a candidate running for office and suggest that the group's members vote for him or her.





Name _____

Interest Groups

A. Vocabulary.

Match the term to the correct definition.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. interest | A) favoring one view or another |
| ___ 2. advocate | B) attention paid to something |
| ___ 3. political action committee | C) to promote or support |
| ___ 4. interest group | D) collection of opinions or attitudes |
| ___ 5. bias | E) represent interest groups and communicate with officials |
| ___ 6. campaign financing | F) how money is earned to pay for political campaigns |
| ___ 7. lobbyist | G) organizations that help interest groups raise money for campaigns |
| ___ 8. public opinion | H) a group of people who work to influence government about a set of issues |



B. How Do You Lobby?

Read each interest group lobby activity and decide if it is an example of informing (I), donating money (D), or endorsing a candidate running for office (E).

- | | |
|--|---|
| ___ 1. Representatives interview a candidate to see if he or she will support the group's position on nuclear plants. If so, the group will back this candidate. | ___ 4. Lobbyists visit with members of Congress and local officials to share their reasons for supporting or opposing an upcoming bill. |
| ___ 2. Volunteers from a teen health interest group go into schools and educate students about the dangers of underage drinking. | ___ 5. Once a candidate has been endorsed, members of an interest group help raise donations to help the candidate's campaign. |
| ___ 3. An interest group runs an ad that supports a candidate running for office. | ___ 6. A group runs TV and radio ads about an issue in order to raise public concern and spur the public to action. |

C. Just the Facts?

Look at how two different interest groups might address the same question. Draw a line matching each group to the answer it would give.

Question: Should the government give tax credits to encourage people to buy electric vehicles?

The Groups

The Answers

EV Drive Coalition. Mission: to encourage policy that would make the United States lead the world in use of electric vehicles.



Most of the people buying electric cars are wealthier so tax credits are really just giving more money to rich people. Let people decide for themselves if they prefer an electric or gas-powered car.

American Petroleum Institute. Mission: to encourage policy that supports U.S. production and sales of oil and natural gas.



If we give people tax credits for buying electric vehicles, those who buy electric cars will pay less when they file their taxes. This will increase the public's interest in buying electric cars which creates stable jobs and reduces air pollution.