Interest Groups

Introducing the Chapter

In this chapter, students will learn about interest groups—the many private organizations that seek to influence the shaping of American public policy.

Make It Relevant

You Can Make a Difference

Several States have instituted a Youth Council or Youth Advisory Committee like that found in Florida’s Pinellas County. Government leaders hope to get young people involved in public policy decisions that affect them. Direct students to find out whether such a committee exists in your county or State. If so, have them summarize the group’s history and describe the areas in which it has become involved. If not, have them draft a letter to local officials or the State representative in which they propose setting up a Youth Council.

Constitutional Principles

Emphasize the following basic principles as students read Chapter 9. Have the class respond to the questions, and then ask volunteers to explain which principle they think a new interest group might take as its founding philosophy, and why.

Popular Sovereignty Interest groups are groups of people with specific shared interests. How can such groups be seen as reflecting popular sovereignty?

Limited Government How do interest groups provide Americans with ways to influence and check government policy?

Federalism In what ways do interest groups balance national and local concerns and agendas?

Interest Groups

“We are a nation of communities, of tens and tens of thousands of ethnic, religious, social, business, labor union, neighborhood, regional and other organizations, all of them varied, voluntary, and unique...”


Do you think that interest groups represent only people with money, power, and influence? On the contrary, many interest groups serve as the voice of ordinary people who care passionately about a cause or policy. They represent the diversity of Americans and their opinions about issues.

Service Learning

The following resources are available only from the Close Up Foundation to support the concepts discussed in Chapter 9 “Interest Groups”:

- Perspectives: Readings on Contemporary American Government
- Trade is Everybody’s Business
- Current Issues: Critical Policy Choices Facing the Nation and the World
You Can Make a Difference

**LOBBYISTS WORK** at both the national and State levels—and they can be teenagers, not just paid professionals. Such was the case in Pinellas County, Florida, when some high school students tried to address an issue of concern to them. Voting procedures in the State of Florida were at the heart of the controversial presidential election of 2000. In the years following, reforms were instituted to ensure more fair and accurate results in future elections. Doing their part, members of the Pinellas County Youth Advisory Committee traveled to Tallahassee to lobby State legislators. They wanted a bill passed that would require all Florida high school seniors to take at least one class period of voter education. Senator Jim Sebesta agreed to sponsor the bill. Said Brian Aungst, Jr., one of the Youth Advisory Committee’s leaders in this effort: “It doesn’t matter that I’m young because I’m involved in the community, and I know what matters to me and what matters to the youth in the community.”

Chapter 9 in Brief

**SECTION 1**

**The Nature of Interest Groups** (pp. 236–240)

- Interest groups are private organizations that try to persuade public officials to respond to the shared attitudes of their members.
- Unlike political parties, interest groups do not nominate candidates, focus on winning elections, or concern themselves with a broad range of issues.
- Among their positive benefits, interest groups stimulate interest in public affairs and serve as a vehicle for participation in the political process.
- Interest groups have been criticized for having influence disproportionate to their size and occasionally using unethical tactics.

**SECTION 2**

**Types of Interest Groups** (pp. 242–247)

- Most people belong to several organizations that meet the definition of an interest group.
- Most interest groups represent economic interests such as business, labor, agriculture, and certain professions.
- Some interest groups are devoted to specific political and social causes, religious interests, or the welfare of a certain segment of the population.
- Public-interest groups work for some aspect of the public good.

**SECTION 3**

**Interest Groups at Work** (pp. 249–254)

- Interest groups supply the public with information favorable to the group’s cause, work to build a positive image for the group, and promote the group’s policies.
- Interest groups frequently use propaganda to achieve their goals.
- While most interest groups take a balanced approach to affecting public policy, single-interest groups focus on an individual issue and fight for this issue aggressively.
- Lobbyists use a variety of techniques to try to persuade policy makers to share an interest group’s point of view.

Internet Update

Use the Prentice Hall School Web site and the Keep It Current CD-ROM to find quick data updates.

Keep It Current CD-ROM includes government-related projects by unit. Students complete each project using current information that they obtain by linking to the Prentice Hall School Web site from the CD-ROM.

Have students access Web Code: mqg-2095 to access this chapter’s updated data.

Pressed for Time?

**To Omit the Chapter**

If you wish to skip Chapter 9, ask students to read the Chapter in Brief and assign the Guide to the Essentials before continuing to another chapter. You may also want to assign the Chapter 9 Test in the Chapter Test booklet. Then specific portions of Chapter 9 may be assigned to students needing reinforcement of key terms and concepts.

**To Preview the Chapter**

To introduce students to key terms and concepts in each section, have them read the Chapter in Brief. You may also assign the Reading Strategy activities on pp. 237, 243, and 250 of this book.

**To Review the Chapter**

When students have completed Chapter 9, you might want to assign the Guide to the Essentials or the Guided Reading and Review worksheets on pp. 36, 38, and 40 of the Unit 2 booklet.

**To Cover the Chapter Quickly**

To cover the material in Chapter 9 quickly, use the following activity. **Focus** Ask students to name any interest groups that they can. You might get them started by naming certain topics that might spark a group’s name for students, such as religion, health care, or debate over gun control. List any names that students offer on the chalkboard. **Instruct** Explain the different kinds of interest groups—business and economic, professional, those relating to certain causes, public interest, etc. Then ask volunteers to identify the type of interest group for each of the names on the chalkboard. **Close/Reteach** Lead a discussion on the techniques different interest groups use. Ask students which technique they think is most useful, or most likely to garner support.