



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. This creates the concern that interest 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. Because of this, there are 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.

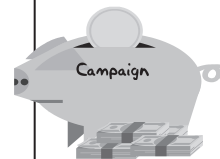
Not everyone agrees about what kinds of rules interest groups should have to follow. Some people fear that campaign financing laws limit the ability of people to support the causes they care about. Others fear that interest groups have grown to have more influence on government than the public at large. 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.

