



CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER

What Role Does Money Play in Politics?

A Mock Campaign

LESSON PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

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Lesson Plan and Activities

Grade Level: 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Subject(s):

- Social Studies: United States Government, State Government, Local Government; and
- Language Arts: Writing, Speaking.

Duration: 2-3 class sessions

Description: This lesson provides an overview of the U.S. election finance process through participation in a mock campaign.

Goals:

Illinois Learning Standards

A. Social Science: 14A, 14B, 14C, 14D; 16A, 16B;

B. English/Language Arts: 1A, 1B, 1C; 3A, 3B, 3C; 4A, 4B; and

C. Mathematics: 7C, 8B, 8C.

Objectives:

1. Understand the basic history of the U.S. campaign finance system.
2. Experience a class presidential campaign involving campaign finance issues.
3. Identify strengths and flaws of the U.S. campaign finance system.
4. Identify possible improvements to the U.S. campaign finance system.

Materials:

1. Paper and pens
2. Fake money from Monopoly or similar

Instruction and Activity:

Lecture

Money and U.S. politics have long been intertwined. Since the 1840s, Congress has attempted to pass legislation to regulate the ways that individuals and groups may give and spend money during campaigns, with only sporadic success. One of the most revered reformers of the American presidency, Teddy Roosevelt, openly solicited two of the country's richest men, E.H. Harriman and Harry C. Frick, for campaign donations before a State of the Union address. To mitigate the resulting political problems, Roosevelt helped spearhead the Tillman Act, which banned corporations from making contributions to any candidate for federal political office. Later, the Hatch Act of 1939 closed a lucrative loophole by prohibiting federal employees from engaging in political activity, as federal employees had for many years solicited campaign

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contributions from those they regulated. In the wake of *Citizens United v Federal Election Commission*, a recent United States Supreme Court case (2010), some of the limitations enacted in earlier legislation were reversed, and corporations and labor unions may now make certain unlimited expenditures to campaigns.

Question: Why do candidates need to raise money at all?

Answer: Running a campaign can be costly. Everything costs money. Candidates must pay for all costs related to their campaigns, from buttons and bumper stickers to postage, stationery, phone bills, and travel expenses. With the rise of television as a popular medium, demands for political money skyrocketed. In the 1956 elections, total campaign spending for all candidates was approximately \$155 million. In 1968, overall spending jumped to \$300 million with a six-fold increase in spending for television advertisements. In today's national elections, it is not uncommon for one single powerful candidate to raise over \$200 million. Campaign financing becomes a race between candidates who do not want to lose because they were outspent by their opponent.

Question: What is the campaign finance process?

Answer: For many people, the process is simple and straightforward. First, they find a candidate or party they support. To demonstrate their support, they contribute money to the individual's campaign for election or reelection, or they donate to the party.

For other individuals, money equals power. These individuals and groups use their money to support candidates, expecting that, in return, those candidates will act in accord with the wishes of their supporters. When you hear people talk about the "lobbyists" and "special interest groups" running government, they are talking about individuals and groups who court politicians with money. In turn, it is widely believed that these individuals and groups wield an inordinate amount of power in government.

Question: Do you see any problems with the campaign finance process as described?

Answer: Wealthy people and groups, by virtue of their monetary contributions, have potentially greater political power with which to accomplish their goals, compared to middle- and low-income people. Also, government officials who should be working for *all* of their constituents might in fact only work for those few individuals and groups that largely financed their campaigns.

Question: Are there any positive aspects to the campaign finance process as it has been described to you so far?

Answer: The United States Supreme Court has held that many forms of political spending are considered political speech, the most highly protected form of speech under the First Amendment. Political speech is seen as essential for a democracy to function properly. Thus an individual's contributions to support a candidate or political party may be considered a form of speech.

Activity: Mock Election

Students will conduct a mock election within the classroom.

1. Choose three candidates to run for classroom president. Each of the candidates should prepare and give a two-minute stump speech about why s/he wants to be classroom president, and why s/he would be good at the job.
2. Divide the rest of the class into the following categories:
 - a. Average Citizens;
 - b. Several large corporations, such as pharmaceutical companies, oil companies, manufacturing companies, construction firms, banks, etc.;
 - c. Unions;
 - d. Advocates for the poor and other special interest groups;
 - e. Retired persons;
 - f. Trial lawyers; and
 - g. Doctors.
3. Make a chart of different types of campaign costs, and how much each might be worth for a strong candidate. For example:
 - a. Mailings -- \$5,000
 - b. Travel -- \$20,000
 - c. Buttons/Bumper Stickers -- \$2,000
 - d. Yard Signs -- \$2,000
 - e. Phone Bills -- \$20,000
 - f. Television Advertising -- \$5,500 per 30-second prime-time slot
 - g. Radio Advertising -- \$1,000 per 15-second prime-time slot
 - h. Other
4. Each candidate will start off with \$1,000 in campaign funds given to them by the government. The different categories of classmates will have the following amounts to give to the candidate of their choice, with the teacher determining discretionary amounts:
 - a. Average citizens -- \$500 per individual;
 - b. Each large corporation -- between \$5,000 and \$100,000, at teacher's discretion;
 - c. Unions -- between \$5,000 to \$75,000, at teacher's discretion;
 - d. Advocates for the poor and other special interest groups -- \$1,000;
 - e. Retired persons -- \$90,000;
 - f. Trial Lawyers -- \$95,000; and
 - g. Doctors -- \$95,000.
5. The candidates should now solicit their classmates both for votes and for more campaign money. The classmates should donate their money as they see fit to the candidate whom they believe will support their views the best.

6. At the end of the time allotted for solicitation, candidates should count their money and determine how they will best and most effectively spend that money according to the campaign costs chart. Each candidate should then prepare a three-minute stump speech on why s/he should be elected classroom president, and how s/he will serve the class.
7. While the candidates are preparing their speeches, have the non-candidate students from all of the categories change their hats and ‘become’ average citizens. As average citizens, what would affect their votes? What would make them vote for a particular candidate?
8. The candidates should now present their stump speeches. Did the candidates’ opinions change based on who gave them money, and what promises they made in order to get that campaign money? Did the candidates stay true to their original platforms? Did the candidates pay attention to the “average citizens” as much as to the big-dollar donors?
9. The class should now take a vote for classroom president. Each student should be voting as an average citizen. Who won? Why? Did the campaign money have any affect on the election?
10. If students saw that money had an effect on the election, do they think that it is right? What would they do to fix the problem?

Return to Lecture

Congress has attempted to regulate campaign donations and spending in a variety of ways since the 1840s, attempting to counter some of the problems that students discovered in the Activity. Significant limitations on campaign contributions and fundraising over the years have come in the following forms:

- prohibition preventing corporations and trade and labor unions from making direct contributions to the campaigns of candidates running for federal office (as a result, unions, corporations, and other interest groups began forming “political action committees” – an organization makes its direct donations to the political action committee, which in turn donates to the political campaign);
- prohibition preventing federal employees from soliciting campaign contributions from individuals and groups that they regulate;
- mandates for strict public disclosure procedures for contributions to federal candidates and political committees;
- limitations on the amounts an individual can contribute to federal campaigns;
- creation of an optional program of full public financing for presidential general election campaigns and public matching subsidies for presidential primary campaigns, if candidates accept certain spending limitations;
- restrictions on the amounts an individual can donate to a political action committee;

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- restrictions on the amounts a political action committee (PAC) can donate to a campaign or to a political party. (These restrictions caused an exponential growth in the number of PACs and the total amount contributed to campaigns and parties continued to increase);
- limitations on “soft money,” money that is raised outside of federal contribution limits that party committees can use to spend on administrative and other non-regulated activities (a restriction which has since been essentially eliminated under the 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*); and
- regulations on the use of soft money to purchase “issue ads,” advertising that is candidate- and issue-specific, but does not expressly advocate for the election or defeat of a particular federal candidate (until this regulation was passed in 2002, PACs raised hundreds of millions of dollars in soft money that could legally be used for issue ads that had a significant effect on national elections; this restriction has also essentially been eliminated under *Citizens United v. FEC*).

While this list of limitations and regulations on campaign finance rules seems comprehensive and strict, individuals and groups continue to find and exploit loopholes outside of the law, allowing them to collect large amounts of unregulated campaign money. The long-term effects of the Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. FEC* remain to be seen, but the decision removed some restrictions on campaign financing that had been in place for decades.

Supplemental Activities

1. Who contributes to the students’ state representatives and senators? Look at the website of the Illinois State Board of Elections (<http://www.elections.il.gov/>). Under the Campaign Disclosure section, the students can search the campaign contribution list of any candidate in the State of Illinois who holds or has spent more than \$10,000 in his or her campaign. Searches can be done by candidate, by committee, and by contributor.
2. Have students search for their representatives by candidate. Who are the current top contributors to these candidates? Are they individuals? Corporations? PACs? Are students surprised by how much or how little each candidate collected in campaign contributions? If the candidate has a small war chest, does the national party “contribute” to the campaign through issue ads?