



VOTE SMART

JUST THE FACTS

Lesson 3 - Politicians and Special Interest Groups

Standards: National Council for the Social Studies

NCSS 5: Individuals, Groups and Institutions

Objectives:

SWBAT (students will be able to) identify a politician and which special interest groups support them.

Subject Matter:

One of the major ways that special interest groups accomplish their goals is by donating money to politicians' campaigns because they support those politicians' position(s) on an issue or issues. The money donated to politicians' campaigns often comes from donations to special interest groups from everyday individuals like you and me.

Materials:

- Lined paper and a pencil
- A computer for each student (or they can work in pairs)
- Internet access

Procedure: (20-30 min)

1. Have students turn on computers and go to www.votesmart.org. In the search bar on the homepage type in the name of a federal or state level politician. If they don't know the name of a politician, they can enter their zip code into the search bar and select a federal or state level politician from the drop-down list (*votesmart.org does not currently provide campaign finance or special interest group ratings for city and county level politicians*).
2. Once they have entered the politician's name into the search bar, have the students click on that person's name and then click on the blue folder below the search bar that says "Funding".
3. When they are on the funding page, have the students look under the "Top Contributors" category (right side of page). Explain to the students that these are organizations, companies, individuals and special interest groups who were the top contributors to that politician's campaign in his/her most recent election. From that list, have students select the donors they think are special interest groups and write them down on a blank sheet of paper. Also, have them write down the amount the

group donated. You can also ask them why they think some of those groups would give money to that particular candidate or elected official.

4. Have students scroll down to the bottom and under “Government and Officials”, select special interest groups. Have students look up the names of the special interest groups and read their descriptions. (Note: Vote Smart only takes groups who publish ratings/endorsements, so not all groups are on the site.)
5. Call on a few students and ask them to give a special interest group off of their list and explain in their own words what the group’s mission is.
6. Explain to the students that tomorrow they will be learning about money and how it influences how a politician votes, as well as how politicians are rated by interest groups. Collect the papers with the special interest groups listed on them from the students because you’ll use them again tomorrow.