



# VOTE SMART

## JUST THE FACTS

### Lesson 4 - Special Interest Group Ratings

#### **Standards: National Council for the Social Studies**

NCSS 5: Individuals, Groups and Institutions

#### **Objectives:**

SWBAT (students will be able to) identify a politician and how he/she is rated by special interest groups.

#### **Subject Matter:**

Like a teacher gives a student a grade for how well he or she completes an assignment, special interest groups give grades or “ratings” to politicians based on how well they think a politician has done with representing the group’s interests while in office. The goal of this lesson is to show students how special interest groups rate politicians, the role money plays and how getting a high rating or a low rating by a group can be a good or bad thing.

#### **Materials:**

- Each student needs their special interest group list from the previous lesson
- A computer for each student (or they can work in pairs)
- Internet access

#### **Procedure: (40-50 min)**

1. Pass out the special interest group list from the previous lesson. Have students turn on computers and go to <http://votesmart.org/interest-groups>. Have them look through the list of special interest groups and select one from the list they made in the previous lesson. Once they are on the special interest group’s page, have them click on the most recent rating from that group.
2. Have them search through the list of politicians and find the politician that they looked up in the previous lesson. Please note that some interest groups do not rate all elected officials. To learn more about how to interpret ratings on our site click [here](#). What is the rating the politician received? Have them write the rating down next to the amount of money the politician received from the group. Have the students do this for the rest of the groups on their list.
3. Ask your students if they notice any trends between the the amount of contributions and the rating the politician received. Were the ratings for the top contributing groups generally high or low? Ask the students why they think it might be important

to a politician to have a high rating from a group. You can also ask them if it would ever be good for a politician to have a low rating from a special interest group. You can tell them that it can be advantageous for a politician to have a low rating from a group because that group's cause or beliefs are not shared by the majority of a politician's constituents. One example of this is if a politician is from an area that is generally in favor of gun control, then their constituents may like the fact that they have a low rating from the NRA. You can reiterate that these ratings are often used during election time to persuade voters to vote for a particular candidate and to hold them accountable to that group's goals/beliefs while in office.

4. To wrap up, call on a student to explain in his/her own words what a rating is and have others say why it can be good to get a high rating and good to get a low rating.