



Special Interest Group Lesson HIGH SCHOOL LESSON

Essential Question: Does a relationship with a special interest group impact how a member of Congress votes on legislation?

Objective: Students will understand how a politician's connection to special interest groups may or may not impact the way he or she votes.

National Standards Addressed: National Standards for Civics and Government, (9-12):

- I. What are the distinctive characteristics of American society?
- II. What is American political culture?
- III. How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunities for participation?
- IV. How has the United States influenced other nations, and how have other nations influenced American politics and society?
- V. What civic dispositions or traits of private and public character are important to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy?
- VI. How can citizens take part in civic life?

Essential Background:

- Prior to this lesson, students should have a good understanding of the Vote Smart website and be able to navigate through it relatively easily. If you have not used this website in class very much, your students may need more guidance on finding the information for this lesson. An introductory lesson that allows students to learn about the website is available.
- Students should be familiar with the members of Congress from their state.
- Students should have a basic understanding of what special interest groups are and their role in policymaking.
- Students should be familiar with current policy issues, as well as the issues presented in Vote Smart's Political Courage Test. You may wish to use the Vote Smart website beforehand for a lesson on key issues in American politics (using either the Vote Smart list or Political Courage Test).
- Check ahead of time to ensure that the members of Congress from your state have completed the Political Courage Test. Check carefully, as many have completed the test for some issues, but not all. If they have

not taken the test, you may want to modify your instructions to include key members of Congress or members from a neighboring state.

Materials:

- Computer access for students
- Special Interest Group handouts for students
- Students should know their 9-digit zip code

Teacher Instructions:

1. Direct students to www.votesmart.org.
2. Have students complete the handout, "Special Interest Groups and Their Impact"
3. Have students discuss the information they gathered and share their reflections either in small groups or a Socratic seminar format.