The Story Matters…

Sometimes they march. At other times they may stand as still as soldiers at attention. They carry big signs with bold lettering. They are union members on a picket line, gathering together to express some dissatisfaction with their job situation. The issues vary, but often include wages, working conditions, and benefits. Whatever the issue, a union’s strength is in the number of its members.

Unions are special interest groups, or organizations made up of people with common interests. When they stage protests, they hope to sway public opinion. If television, newspaper, and other media coverage is positive, it can help them in negotiations with employers. Powerful unions and other interest groups can also influence lawmakers and public policy.

PHOTO: Jim West/PhotoEdit
Real-Life Civics

**INFLUENCE** How do people in government make policy decisions? How do they decide what is best for the country’s citizens? As they put together plans for government actions, policy makers may seek the opinions of special interest groups.

With membership open to anybody over the age of 50, the AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) is one of the country’s largest—and most powerful—interest groups. The AARP focuses on a wide variety of issues that concern many older Americans. These issues include Social Security, other retirement benefits, and health care. Among the AARP’s advertised list of member benefits is “a voice in Washington and in your state.” When an interest group of this size speaks, lawmakers tend to listen.

Members of the AARP attend a rally in support of a Medicare health care bill.

NGSSS covered in Real-Life Civics

Students will understand the following benchmarks from the Florida Next Generation Sunshine State Standards.

**SS.7.C.2.10** Examine the impact of media, individuals, and interest groups on monitoring and influencing government.
MEMBERSHIP OF SELECTED INFLUENTIAL INTEREST GROUPS

The graph shows the number of Americans who are members of some of the largest interest groups in the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTEREST GROUP</th>
<th>NUMBER OF MEMBERS (IN MILLIONS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Farm Bureau Federation</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Rifle Association</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Association of Retired People</td>
<td>40.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFL-CIO</td>
<td>12.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Education Association</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Wildlife Federation</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

When lawmakers listen to the opinions of interest groups, whose voice is loudest? If influence is measured by numbers, then the groups represented in the graph have a good share of power. Interest groups play a key role in shaping policy and legislation. The interests of the groups shown on the graph are wide-ranging. The AFL-CIO, or American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, focuses its attention on labor law and policy. The National Rifle Association (NRA) wants to uphold an individual’s right to bear firearms. The other groups concern themselves with legislation and policy issues related to aging, wildlife conservation, education, and farming. Laws related to these and many other issues are influenced by the millions of members who belong to the country’s interest groups.

Inferring Which interest group in the graph has the most members? Why might that group have such a large membership?

Your Opinion What are some issues that are important to you? Would you be willing to join interest groups related to those issues? Explain your answer.
Lesson 1
Forming Public Opinion

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
How do citizens, both individually and collectively, influence government policy?

It Matters Because
Public opinion affects leaders’ actions, but leaders also try to shape public opinion.

Public Opinion
GUIDING QUESTION What is public opinion?

Have you ever been in a situation where people were making decisions that affected you? Did you ask those making the decisions to give you a chance to say what you thought about that situation? Did you speak out to let your ideas be known?

That is what many Americans do when they care deeply about political issues. In a democracy, the public—all the people in our nation—are the source of political power. By speaking out, members of the public make their views known. In doing so, they can influence the decisions that leaders make.

The Role of Public Opinion in a Democracy

The term for the views of all Americans is public opinion. Public opinion refers to the ideas and attitudes that people hold about an issue or a person.

Public opinion plays two key roles in a democracy. First, public opinion helps shape the decisions that officials make. Congressional and state legislators often travel back to their districts to meet with voters and talk about bills that are up for
a vote. These officials recognize that if they are to represent the people, their votes should reflect the views of the people.

Presidents are guided by public opinion in this way too. They need to have a good sense of when the public is ready for a new idea. President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, “I cannot go any faster than the people will let me.” That statement reflects a truth about leadership in a democracy.

Second, public opinion also shapes how successful a president is in putting his or her plans into action. Presidents need the support of Congress to carry out their programs. A president is more likely to have that support if his or her plans are popular with the public. The same is true of state governors and city mayors. When these leaders have the backing of the public, lawmakers are more willing to go along with their plans.

Of course, public opinion is a complicated thing. The United States has more than 310 million people. They come from different regions and backgrounds. In fact, Americans agree on very few issues. Instead, different groups hold distinct opinions. For instance, some Americans want the government to take a larger role in the economy. Others disagree. They want a smaller, less active government. Between these two positions are many other opinions. When enough people hold an opinion, government officials listen to them.

**Sources of Public Opinion**

Where do opinions on public issues come from? Why do people hold such different views about these matters? Several factors may influence opinions. One is a person’s background. Another is the mass media. A third is interest groups.

**Personal Background**

People’s opinions are often based on their experiences and their situation in life. Age and **gender**—being male or female—play key roles in shaping opinions. So do race and religion. A person’s job, income, and where he or she lives affect opinions too. All these personal factors work together to influence how each individual views public issues.

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**Academic Vocabulary**

- **public opinion** the ideas and attitudes that people hold about elected officials, candidates, government, and political issues

- **gender** whether a person is male or female

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**CRITICAL THINKING**

**Listing** What are two other ways of expressing opinions that you can name? SS.7.C.2.3

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Americans are free to express their opinions in many different ways, from wearing a T-shirt with a message to writing a letter to a member of Congress.
Think about the issue of education. A mother of two school-age children who lives in a city will probably want her state to invest more money in education. An elderly person who lives in a small town will probably be less interested in seeing increased spending on schools. On the other hand, an older adult who is a teacher would have yet another point of view, even if he or she does not have school-age children.

**Mass Media**

A second factor shaping opinion is the mass media. A medium is a means of communication. *Media*, the plural, refers to many different means of communication. Cell phone text messages are a medium of communication. The **mass media** include all the various methods of communication that reach large numbers of people. These media include television, radio, Internet Web sites, newspapers, magazines, books, recordings, and movies.

The mass media influence public opinion in many ways. Television news shows and newspapers shape public opinion with the stories they publish. If they carry many stories about an issue, people may begin to view that issue as important. The opinions stated by television news commentators can affect the way people respond to issues. Newspapers also publish editorials that take a position on important issues. Editorials can encourage support for the author’s point of view. The same thing is true of blogs posted on the Internet.

**Interest Groups**

A third source of public opinion is **interest groups**. These groups are made up of people who share a point of view about an issue. Interest groups try to influence public opinion in many ways. They work to convince other people to adopt their point of view. They also work to convince public officials to support their positions. Because they may put political pressure on leaders to act in a certain way, interest groups are sometimes called pressure groups.

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**CRITICAL THINKING**

*Categorizing* Is this kind of communication a private message or a type of mass medium? Explain.

**LA.7.1.6.1**
Features of Public Opinion

Public opinion is often described in terms of three factors. They are direction, intensity, and stability. Each measures a different aspect of public opinion.

Direction refers to whether public opinion on a topic is positive or negative. For example, are people for or against spending more money on national defense? Are they for or against a cut in taxes? On most topics, the direction of public opinion is mixed. Still, one side can be stronger than the other.

Intensity refers to how strongly a person or group holds an opinion on an issue. Most Americans have the strongest beliefs about issues that directly affect them. For example, farmers are more interested than city dwellers in farm issues. People who use a subway train or a bus to get to work are very interested in mass transit.

When people hold a strong opinion on an issue, they pay more attention to it. They may also decide to become active on that issue. They might join an interest group or work on an election campaign. Still others might take part in public actions aimed at solving a problem.

Stability is a matter of how firmly people hold to their views. In other words, how likely are they to change their minds? Opinions tend to be very stable when they are based on strong beliefs. For example, most people’s opinions about civil rights are more stable than their opinions about political candidates.
Public Opinion Polls

GUIDING QUESTION  How is public opinion measured?

Public opinion can affect policy, but how do political leaders learn what the public thinks about an issue? They draw on two tools: election results and measures of public opinion.

Election Results

One way to discover public opinion on an issue is by looking at election results. If voters elect a candidate, they probably agree with many of the candidate’s ideas.

Election results are not always a sure way to measure public opinion, however. People vote for candidates for many reasons. Maybe they liked how a candidate looked. Perhaps they supported some, but not all, of the candidate’s views. They may back a candidate because of his or her party. For these reasons, election results give only a rough sense of public opinion.

Another problem with using elections as measures of public opinion is that they happen only every few years. If leaders had to wait until the next election to know public opinions, they could spend two or more years with no sense of what people think.

Polls Measure Public Opinion

To keep in touch with public opinion more regularly, many public officials rely on polls. A public opinion poll is a survey in which individuals are asked to answer questions about a particular issue or person.

CRITICAL THINKING

Analyzing  What attitude does the cartoonist have toward polling? Why do you say so?  SS.7.C.2.10

NGSSS covered in “Public Opinion Polls”

SS.7.C.2.10 Examine the impact of media, individuals, and interest groups on monitoring and influencing government.

LA.7.1.7.1 The student will use background knowledge of subject and related content areas, prereading strategies, graphic representations, and knowledge of text structure to make and confirm complex predictions of content, purpose, and organization of a reading selection.
in which individuals are asked to answer questions about a particular issue or person. Today hundreds of groups conduct such polls. Members of the media and politicians refer to poll results to check on people’s attitudes.

Most presidents, for example, have a specialist whose job is to conduct polls. This pollster can measure how popular the president is. He or she can also find out how the public feels about programs that the president is considering. For example, a poll might ask people if they support or oppose a change in immigration laws.

Pollsters have different ways of selecting the people they survey. One way is by picking a group of people at random, or by chance. Pollsters may talk to about 1,500 people from all over the nation. Such a sample usually includes both men and women. It also includes people of nearly all races and ages. Finally, a random sample polls people with different incomes. A good sample is a small representation of the entire population. That way, it can present a reasonably accurate picture of public opinion as a whole. Polls conducted using random sampling are known as scientific polls.

To find out how people really feel about an issue, pollsters must word questions carefully. Poorly worded questions can lead to confused answers. Also, by changing the wording of the questions, pollsters can influence the answers they receive. For example, the question “Do you favor cutting taxes?” might produce one kind of answer from a person. “Do you favor cutting taxes if it means letting poor people go hungry?” might produce a different answer from the same person.
Polls in which the questions are worded so as to shape a person’s responses are called push polls. Push polls are strongly criticized by companies and individuals who carry out scientific polls. When looking at poll results, citizens should ask themselves whether the questions were fair and unbiased. In push polls, questions are designed to create a certain response.

### Pros and Cons of Polls

Some people believe that public opinion polls are useful. They say that polls tell politicians what citizens think about issues. Polls show officials whether people approve or disapprove of the way they are doing their jobs. Officials do not have to wait for the next election to find out what is important to voters.

Those in favor of polling also point to another feature of these surveys. People’s responses are often broken down by particular groups, such as how men and women or people earning different amounts of money respond to the same question. These categories help leaders know what specific groups think about an issue. That knowledge can help guide their decisions.

Other people see problems with using polls. They argue that polling makes elected officials focus on pleasing the public. They think officials should instead focus their attention on making wise decisions for the common good.

Many people also worry that polls have a strong effect on how people vote. The media carry out polls constantly during election campaigns and then report who is ahead in the race. Critics argue that these polls treat an election like a horse race. They worry that focusing on polls ignores the candidates’ views on important issues. In addition, some say that polls can discourage voting. If the polls show one candidate far ahead of another, some people may decide not to bother voting.

### PROGRESS CHECK

#### Identifying

Besides elections, what is another way to measure public opinion?
Lesson 2
The Mass Media

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION** How do citizens, both individually and collectively, influence government policy?

**IT MATTERS BECAUSE** The mass media can be an important source of information about government and public issues.

The Influence of the Media

**GUIDING QUESTION** How do the media influence public opinion and government?

How do you find out what is going on in the world? Do you listen to the radio in the morning? Do you download podcasts? Does your school have a newspaper or a news show that reports events? Do you check headlines on the Internet or watch the evening news on television? If you are like most Americans, you get your news from one or more of these forms of mass media. In the United States, the mass media play a key role in informing people about issues. They also influence government. Finally, the media link the people to elected officials.

There are two types of mass media sources. Print media include newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and books. Radio, television, and the Internet are examples of electronic media.

In using media information, you must remember an important fact. Most American media outlets are private businesses. They are run to make a profit. For that reason, media managers often decide what to publish based on what will attract the most viewers, listeners, or readers. The larger the audience, the more the media can charge advertisers. This fact shapes what the media cover.

**Content Vocabulary**
- public agenda
- leak
- watchdog
- prior restraint
- libel

**Taking Notes: Organizing**
As you read, create a graphic organizer to record the different roles of the media.

**NGSSS covered in “The Influence of the Media”**

**SS.7.C.2.10** Examine the impact of media, individuals, and interest groups on monitoring and influencing government.

**LA.7.1.6.1** The student will use new vocabulary that is introduced and taught directly.

**LA.7.1.7.3** The student will determine the main idea or essential message in grade-level or higher texts through inferring, paraphrasing, summarizing, and identifying relevant details.

**SS.7.C.2.10** Examine the impact of media, individuals, and interest groups on monitoring and influencing government.
Influencing the Public Agenda

The government deals with many problems and issues. Those that receive the most time, money, and effort from government leaders make up what is often called the **public agenda**. An agenda is a set of items that a person or group wants to address.

The media can influence which problems officials regard as important. When the media focus on a problem, people begin to worry about it. Then they expect the government to deal with it.

Covering Candidates and Officials

The mass media can also influence who runs for office. Usually candidates are experienced politicians. They spend years working in their political parties. Some candidates, though, are people who were famous in another field. For instance, actor Arnold Schwarzenegger was elected governor of California in 2003. When candidates are already well-known, the media cover their campaigns with interest. In this way, the candidate benefits from the media’s desire to cover their campaign.

Reporters and politicians have a complex relationship. They need each other. Reporters need information to write articles. Political leaders need media coverage to get their message out. At the same time, the two groups often clash. As one presidential assistant explained, “Politicians live—and sometimes die—by the press. The press lives by politicians.”

Officials try to use the media to their advantage. They may **leak**, or secretly pass on, information to reporters. They may do this to test the public’s response to a proposal before they openly **acknowledge**, or admit, that they are considering it. If the public reacts well, officials might act on the idea. If the public reacts negatively, officials can drop it. Politicians also use leaks to shape public opinion on an issue, or to gain favor with a reporter.

At the same time, reporters can present news in ways that show an official in a bad light.
They can ask officials tough questions about the positions that the officials take. Politicians sometimes try to avoid this difficulty by refusing to answer their questions. That practice, though, can result in criticism from the media.

**Watchdog Role**

The mass media also play a crucial “watchdog” role. That means they keep a close eye on government activities. Journalists write stories that expose waste and corruption at all levels of government. These kinds of stories attract a large audience. Throughout our history, the media have played this role. This has served the interests of both the media and the public by exposing wrongdoing by public officials.

**Media and National Security**

Americans need to stay informed. At the same time, the government must keep some secrets for national security reasons. The government can classify, or label, some information as secret. That information is then off-limits to reporters.

The government can use other methods to try to shape the news. During the first part of the war in Iraq, some journalists accompanied American troops going into battle. They reported on battles and on daily life of the troops. Some critics said that this practice allowed the government to control news reporting.

**PROGRESS CHECK**

*Categorizing* What are the two broad types of mass media sources?

**Academic Vocabulary**

- **acknowledge** to admit
- **watchdog** the role played by a media organization that exposes illegal practices or waste
Protecting the Press

GUIDING QUESTION What are the restrictions on freedom of the press?

The Framers understood that democracy needs a free flow of information and ideas. Citizens need information to understand public issues. They need that information to be free of government control as well. So the Framers wanted the press to be independent to ensure that goal.

The Framers showed how highly they valued a free press by protecting the press from government interference. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says that Congress cannot pass any law that would limit the freedom of the press. When it was written, the amendment applied to print media, which were the only forms in existence. Now, though, this protection extends to radio, TV, and the Internet as well.

Because of the First Amendment, the media are free from prior restraint. Prior restraint refers to government censorship of material before it is published. Generally, the government cannot censor the media that way. Reporters and editors are free to decide what they will say, even if it is unpopular. In fact, sometimes the media publish information that embarrasses the government or a politician.

Freedom Within Limits

Freedom of the press is not unlimited, though. As you have read, the government can keep some information secret. Also, no one is free to publish false information that will harm another
person’s reputation. Doing so is called libel. Anyone who believes a written story has harmed him or her may sue the publisher for libel. Government officials rarely win libel lawsuits, however. In New York Times Co. v. Sullivan (1964), the Supreme Court ruled in a libel case. It said that public officials must prove actual malice, or evil intent, to win a libel suit. The official must prove that the publisher either knew the material was false or showed a reckless disregard for the truth.

The media also have some other protections. Gathering news may depend on getting facts from people who do not want to have their names made public. The press and the government have fought many battles over reporters’ right to keep their sources secret. Most states have shield laws that protect reporters from having to reveal their sources.

Regulating the Media

The federal government does have ways to regulate the broadcast media. The airwaves available for radio and TV broadcasting are limited. The government decides who can use them. In order to receive a license that allows them to broadcast, companies must meet certain standards. For example, a portion of their programming must be devoted to covering public affairs, usually through news programs. In addition, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) oversees broadcasters. The FCC is a regulatory, or managing, agency. It cannot censor broadcasts, but it can punish stations that break its rules. Fines for breaking these rules can run to several thousand dollars, so stations are careful about what people say and do on the air. For example, stations edit out words that break FCC rules.

✔ PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying What are two ways the federal government can manage broadcast media?

LESSON 2 REVIEW

Review Vocabulary
1. How are the public agenda and the media connected? LA.7.1.6.1
2. How might leaks help the media perform their role as a watchdog? LA.7.1.6.1
3. Use prior restraint and libel to explain the limits placed on the free press. LA.7.1.6.1

Answer the Guiding Questions
4. Analyzing Why do politicians and the media need each other? SS.7.C.2.10
5. Describing What are two ways freedom of the press is limited? SS.7.C.2.10
6. PERSUASIVE WRITING Journalists want to be free of government limits on their work. Government officials want some control over the media. Taking the point of view of a journalist or a government official, write a paragraph to persuade others to your position on how much government should be able to restrict what the media report. SS.7.C.2.13
Landmark Supreme Court Cases

Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier

The Supreme Court’s 1969 ruling in Tinker v. Des Moines found that public school students had a First Amendment right to freedom of speech in the school. Did those rights extend to freedom of the press?

Background of the Case
Hazelwood East High School, near St. Louis, Missouri, had a school newspaper for students in its journalism classes. Before each issue, Principal Robert Reynolds reviewed the pages. While looking over an issue, Reynolds objected to two articles. One article was about three students who were pregnant. The other talked about one student’s experience with parents who were getting a divorce. No students’ names were used in the articles. Nevertheless, Reynolds felt readers could easily identify who the students were. For that reason, he canceled the two pages on which those articles appeared.

Kathy Kuhlmeier and two other students who worked on the newspaper did not like this decision. They sued the school. They claimed that their First Amendment rights to freedom of the press had been denied.

The Decision
Relying on the Supreme Court’s decision in Tinker v. Des Moines, a lower court ruled in favor of the students. The school appealed the case to the Supreme Court. On January 8, 1988, the Supreme Court reversed this ruling. The Court drew a sharp line between individual expression—which it supported in Tinker—and the content of a school newspaper. Justice Byron R. White wrote:

“A school must be able to set high standards for the student speech that is disseminated [distributed] under its [sponsorship] . . . and may refuse to disseminate student speech that does not meet those standards.”

Why It Matters
The Hazelwood decision did not, of course, take away all First Amendment rights from school newspapers. Nevertheless, supporters of free speech and student interest groups said that the Hazelwood decision meant censorship. The Student Press Law Center reports that a number of schools, fearing lawsuits, have done away with student newspapers. Following this decision, some schools have even blocked the publication of student yearbooks. Others have moved to stop stage performances or to censor the content of student-based Web pages.

Analyzing the Case
1. Analyzing Why did the students writing for the school newspaper sue the school?
2. Concluding How do you think the Hazelwood decision could affect a school’s responsibility to educate?
Lesson 3
Interest Groups and Lobbying

ESSENTIAL QUESTION  How do citizens, both individually and collectively, influence government policy?

It Matters Because
Interest groups are one vehicle people use to make their views known and to work for causes they believe in.

Interest Groups

GUIDING QUESTION  How do special-interest groups influence public policy?

Have you ever gone to see your senator or representative’s social media page or Web site? Have you ever e-mailed or called your representatives? Government officials want to be linked with their constituents—the people they represent. They want to hear from those people, to know what they think and why they think it. If you want the government to take action, you have many ways to contact your representatives.

As an individual, you have just one voice. That voice might not stand out when a member of Congress hears from thousands of people. How can you make your voice stronger?

One way to strengthen your voice is to join with others who agree with you on an issue. When you join together with others, you all pool your resources and increase your influence. Interest groups can be a powerful force to bring about change. An interest group is a group of people who share a point of view and unite to promote that viewpoint. The First Amendment guarantees Americans the right to assemble and to belong to interest groups. The right to petition the government makes it possible for those groups to meet with officials to promote their goals.

NGSSS covered in “Interest Groups”

SS.7.C.2.10  Examine the impact of media, individuals, and interest groups on monitoring and influencing government.

SS.7.C.2.11  Analyze media and political communications (bias, symbolism, propaganda).

LA.7.1.6.1  The student will use new vocabulary that is introduced and taught directly.

LA.7.1.7.3  The student will determine the main idea or essential message in grade-level or higher texts through inferring, paraphrasing, summarizing, and identifying relevant details.

Taking Notes:  Summarizing SS.7.C.2.10
As you read, use a graphic organizer to summarize the ways interest groups influence government and the ways government regulates interest groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influencing Government</th>
<th>Regulating Groups</th>
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Content Vocabulary
- public-interest group
- nonpartisan
- lobbyist
The interest group Earthjustice staged this “21 Chainsaw Salute” to protest a government decision that allowed lumber companies to cut trees in national forests.

**CRITICAL THINKING**

**Categorizing** What type of interest group do you think Earthjustice represents? Why? LA.7.1.7.3

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**Business and Labor Groups**

Some interest groups are based on shared economic goals. For instance, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce promotes the interest of businesses. Other interest groups act for specific types of businesses. The National Automobile Dealers Association, for example, works on behalf of companies that sell cars and trucks. These groups try to sway government decisions on issues that affect their industries.

Some interest groups are formed by workers. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is the largest such group. It is formed by many labor unions that have joined together. Unions try to improve wages, working conditions, and benefits for their members.

**Other Interest Groups**

People also join together to work for the rights of people who share similar characteristics. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) tries to improve the lives of African Americans. The AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) stands up for the interests of older Americans.

Other interest groups focus on particular issues. For example, the Sierra Club wants to protect nature. The National Rifle Association (NRA) looks after the interests of people who own guns.

The interest groups described so far promote only the goals of their members’ interests. **Public-interest groups** work to benefit larger sections of society. They support causes that affect the lives of most Americans. One example is the League of Women Voters. This **nonpartisan** group is free from ties to any political party. Its purpose is to educate voters about candidates and issues. Other public-interest groups work for the rights of all consumers.

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**Reading HELPDESK**

**Reading Strategy: Taking Notes** SS.7.C.2.10

Use a two-column chart to take notes on interest groups. In the left column, list the types. In the right column, list examples of each type.

**public-interest group** an organization that supports causes that affect the lives of Americans in general

**nonpartisan** free from party ties or bias
Interest Groups at Work
Interest groups play an important role in our country. Their main goal is to influence the decisions that leaders make. To do this, they use four main types of actions. These are being active in elections, working through the courts, working directly with lawmakers, and trying to shape public opinion. Groups can use one or more of these approaches. Many use all four.

Being Active in Elections
Many interest groups become involved in elections. They support certain candidates. For example, the Sierra Club might back candidates who favor laws to protect nature. Many interest groups have formed political action committees (PACs). In fact, most labor unions have PACs. So do many companies and trade associations.

PACs collect money from group members. They give that money to help candidates they think will support their positions on the issues they care about. They can also spend money to oppose candidates they want to see defeated. For instance, a political action committee might buy television or radio ads that criticize a candidate it knows does not share its goals.

Working Through the Courts
Many interest groups try to shape policy by bringing cases to court. For instance, an interest group for women might help a woman worker sue a company if it feels she was paid unfairly. The NAACP has used lawsuits to help end laws that treated African Americans unfairly.

CRITICAL THINKING
Identifying Which groups involved in the health care reform debate were directly involved in health care?

Explaining The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is an interest group of businesses. Why do you think this group was involved in the health care debate? LA.7.1.7.3
Directly Influencing Officials

One of the most important methods interest groups use to shape policy is lobbying. **Lobbyists** are people who represent interest groups. They contact lawmakers or other government officials directly. Lobbyists are active at all levels of government—local, state, and national.

The term *lobbyist* was first used in the 1830s. At that time, it described people who waited in the lobbies of the state capitol buildings to ask lawmakers for favors. Few lobbyists use that strategy today. Good lobbyists know whom to contact about a particular concern. They understand how the government works and are very good at public relations. They are also skilled at making friends and speaking persuasively.

The most effective lobbyists supply lawmakers with information that helps their causes. They suggest solutions to problems. Sometimes they write drafts of bills for lawmakers to consider. They may even testify before Congress about the bills. All of these activities give lawmakers a lot of information. Of course, these actions also reflect only the interest group’s position on the issue. They are **biased**, in that they do not present all sides of an issue. When many different groups are involved, however, their different biases may even out.

The work of lobbyists does not end once a law is passed. Their interest groups also try to make sure the laws are enforced in ways that favor their interests.

**Shaping Public Opinion**

All interest groups want to influence public opinion. They also want to convince people that their cause is important. Many send information to people by e-mail or regular mail. They use messages to try to convince people to join the group. They also advertise. Maybe you have seen ads urging you to drink milk or buy American-made products. Business groups sponsor these types of ads. Interest groups also hold protests and organize public events to gain media coverage and notice for their cause.

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**Academic Vocabulary**

- **biased**: favoring one view
- **guarantee**: to promise

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**CRITICAL THINKING**

Analyzing Visuals

What is the cartoonist’s attitude toward lobbyists? How can you tell? LA.7.1.7.3

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*This political cartoon pokes fun at the more than 12,000 people registered with the federal government as official lobbyists.*

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*Vendor: Program: Copyright year: Component: Grade Level: Pass: APTARA CEG C12_L3 PDF Pages 2013 SE (FL) 344_347_CEG_SE_C12_L3_660085.indd Page 344  2/17/11  10:08 PM s-74user*
Interest groups can provide useful, in-depth information on an issue. They may also use propaganda techniques to promote their ideas. Propaganda is presenting information in a slanted or biased way. The chart about propaganda techniques describes different methods that groups use. Understanding these will help you identify bias in the information you see.

PROGRESS CHECK

**Naming** What tools do interest groups use to influence government and public opinion?

Regulating Interest Groups

**GUIDING QUESTION** How does the government regulate interest groups?

The Constitution guarantees, or promises, Americans the right to take part in interest groups. Still, both state governments and the federal government have laws about what these groups can do. Some laws limit how much money PACs may contribute to candidates. Others require lobbyists to register with officials who have the authority to oversee them. Lobbyists must also state who hired them, how much they are paid, and how they spend money related to their work. These laws are aimed at preventing lobbyists from gaining unfair influence.

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE BANDWAGON</th>
<th>NAME-CALLING</th>
<th>ENDORSEMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE BANDWAGON</strong></td>
<td><strong>NAME-CALLING</strong></td>
<td><strong>ENDORSEMENT</strong></td>
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<td>“Polls show our candidate is pulling ahead, and we expect to win in a landslide.”</td>
<td>“Candidate A is a dangerous extremist.”</td>
<td>Popular beauty queen says, “I’m voting for Candidate B and so should you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRANSFER</strong></td>
<td><strong>GLITTERING GENERALITY</strong></td>
<td><strong>JUST PLAIN FOLKS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associating a patriotic symbol with a candidate.</td>
<td>“Candidate B is the one who will bring us peace and prosperity.”</td>
<td>“My parents were ordinary, hardworking people, and they taught me those values.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STACKED CARDS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Candidate C has the best record on the environment.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

These propaganda techniques, or methods, are similar to those that companies use in advertising to promote their products to consumers.

**CRITICAL THINKING**

1. **Identifying** Which of these methods would be used by a group that opposed a candidate? Why?

2. **Applying** Suppose you saw an ad for a candidate that included the phrase “She’s one of us.” Which technique would that represent? SS.7.C.2.11

NGSSS covered in “Regulating Interest Groups”

- **SS.7.C.2.10** Examine the impact of media, individuals, and interest groups on monitoring and influencing government.
- **SS.7.C.2.11** Analyze media and political communications (bias, symbolism, propaganda).
Federal and state laws also require former government officials to wait for a period of time before they can become lobbyists. The delay is meant to stop these former officials from using friendships and inside knowledge to help special-interest groups. This kind of law, however, has not been successful. After waiting for a period of time, former lawmakers do become lobbyists. Because they understand how the legislature works and often still have friends among lawmakers, they can be very influential.

Interest groups have critics and defenders. Some people say that interest groups and lobbyists have too much say in government. They claim that by giving money to a campaign, special-interest groups gain power over elected officials. Many critics point to the example of Jack Abramoff. He was one of Washington’s most powerful lobbyists. In 2006, Abramoff admitted that he corrupted government officials and stole millions of dollars from his lobbying clients. Some critics say that it is wrong for interest groups to have more influence than ordinary voters.

Other people defend interest groups. They say these groups help make known the wishes of large groups of people. In that way, they help make sure that the government responds to people’s concerns. In this view, interest groups provide a service by letting representatives know the people’s wishes.

Supporters of interest groups also say that these groups are an important part of a democracy. They provide a way for Americans to take an active role in government. By joining forces, ordinary people can pressure the government to follow the policies they believe are important.

**PROGRESS CHECK**

*Explaining* Why must former government officials wait before becoming lobbyists?

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**LESSON 3 REVIEW**

**Review Vocabulary**

1. How are public-interest groups and nonpartisan groups similar? How are they different? [LA.7.1.6.1]

2. How do lobbyists differ from political action committees (PACs)? [LA.7.1.6.1]

**Answer the Guiding Questions**

3. *Identifying* What are four ways that interest groups promote their viewpoints and try to influence public policy? [SS.7.C.2.10]

4. *Explaining* Why does the government regulate interest groups, despite constitutional guarantees of their right to exist? Explain the reason for one regulation to support your answer. [SS.7.C.2.10]

5. *EXPOSITORY WRITING* You have read about political parties and about interest groups. Write a paragraph in which you compare interest groups and political parties. How are they similar? How are they different? [SS.7.C.2.10, LA.7.1.7.3]
Are social networking sites good for democracy?

Social networking sites—like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter—are part of daily life. Can these sites have any impact on government? Can they be tools for democracy? People are debating.

On one side are people who think that these sites will increase democracy. They argue that networking sites make it easier for people to join with others. Some even say that people can use the sites to more easily bring about profound change.

On the other side are those who dismiss social networking sites. They argue that the connections people make on these sites are not deep. As a result, they say, these connections are unlikely to have a major impact.

**Yes**

Those who see social networks as a revolutionary tool often point to the role of this technology in forming grass-roots movements in countries. Lecturer and writer Howard Rheingold makes the point: “Joseph Estrada was toppled as president of the Philippines in part because of text-message-organized protests, and Roh Moo-Hyun won an upset victory for president in South Korea also in part because of a last-minute text-message-based get-out-the-vote effort.” Rheingold goes on to say that denying the role of these sites in elections is ignoring the facts.


**No**

Others say that clicking a symbol on a social networking site to show agreement with a cause means little. Real change, they say, requires deeper commitment. Writer Malcolm Gladwell makes this argument: “Social media are built around weak ties. Twitter is a way of following (or being followed by) people you may never have met. Facebook is a tool . . . for keeping up with the people you would not otherwise be able to stay in touch with.” Gladwell says that to really bring about change, activists need discipline and dedication. That, he argues, is not likely to be developed by sending tweets or clicking a button that says “Like.”


**Debating the Issue**

1. **Making Connections** What political use might social networking sites have? Explain.
2. **Analyzing** Would social networking sites be better for get-out-the-vote movements than for movements of deeper social change? Why or why not?
3. **Analyzing** Do you agree with Gladwell that ties on social networking sites are weak? Why or why not?
4. **Making Inferences** How could these sites be useful in countries where the government censors the news?
Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1 **Writing Activity** SS.7.C.2.10

**EXPLORING THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION**

How do citizens, both individually and collectively, influence government policy?

In an essay, describe three forces that influence the actions of government officials. Explain how politicians learn about public opinion and how knowing public opinion can affect their actions; how the media affect public opinion and the actions of government officials; and how interest groups influence policy. Give an example of each of these sources of influence. Conclude by stating which of the three forces you think has the most effect on the government and explaining why you think so.

2 **21st Century Skills** SS.7.C.2.3

**PERSUADING** Working with a small group, identify an issue you care a lot about. Think of your group as an interest group. You want to inform others about your issue and your point of view about it. Decide what message you want to put out to people. Make a video or design a Web page that gets that message out. In assembling your video or Web page, be sure to consider the audience you want to reach and how you can influence that audience.

3 **Being an Active Citizen** SS.7.C.2.3

As a class, brainstorm issues that you think are important in your community. Then, working with a small group, choose one of those issues and conduct a poll to find out where people in your area stand on that issue. Design a survey of five to ten questions about the issue. Word the questions carefully to avoid influencing answers. Have each person in your group get five people to respond to the questions. Tally your results and discuss with the class.

4 **Understanding Visuals** SS.7.C.2.11

Political cartoons use humor to make a point. Examine the political cartoon shown here. Who is the character in the cartoon? What kind of media does he represent? Summarize the cartoon’s message. What does it say about how the media are changing? What does it say about the information that people obtain from media sources?
REVIEW THE GUIDING QUESTIONS

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question.

1. Which of the following is a source of public opinion?
   A. the mass media
   B. regulatory commissions
   C. surveys
   D. pollsters

2. In terms of opinions, stability refers to:
   F. the direction of public opinion.
   G. whether opinion is positive or negative.
   H. the strength of a person’s opinion.
   I. how firmly people believe in their views.

3. Issues that receive the most time, money, and attention from government leaders make up:
   A. the mass media.
   B. public opinion.
   C. the public agenda.
   D. a public-interest group.

4. Which of the following is an example of a politician using the mass media to get his or her message out?
   F. leaking information
   G. reporting corruption
   H. restricting libel
   I. establishing prior restraint

5. What is the name for representatives of interest groups who contact public officials directly?
   A. propagandists
   B. lobbyists
   C. pollsters
   D. political action committees

6. What is an argument in favor of interest groups?
   F. They tell elected officials what the people want.
   G. They have too much influence on government.
   H. They encourage corruption among politicians.
   I. They are almost always nonpartisan.
DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

Directions: Analyze the excerpt and answer the questions.

The following passage comes from the Web site of an interest group called Common Cause and describes its work.

“Common Cause’s work to improve ethics in Washington dates back to the first days of the organization. The group has helped make significant institutional reforms on Capitol Hill, which include creating tough Congressional ethics standards and financial disclosure laws and establishing a ban that restricts members from taking gifts, free vacation trips, and expensive meals from special interests.”

—Common Cause Web site, 2010

Classifying Which of the following best describes Common Cause?
A. a labor union
B. a public-interest group
C. a political action committee
D. a partisan polling organization

Predicting Which of the following might Common Cause criticize?
F. partisan groups
G. political parties
H. public opinion polls
I. lobbyists

SHORT RESPONSE

“Our liberty cannot be guarded but by the freedom of the press, nor that be limited without danger of losing it.”

—Thomas Jefferson, letter to John Jay, 1786

What is Jefferson’s point about the importance of the press to a democracy? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Think about what you have read about the roles the press plays. Which role, do you think, would be what Jefferson had in mind when he attached such importance to freedom of the press?

EXTENDED RESPONSE

Persuasive Writing Think about the roles of the individual, the mass media, and interest groups in American government. What are the most effective ways an individual or group can participate in government? What impact do the three roles have on monitoring and influencing government? Use evidence from the chapter to support your point of view.

Need Extra Help?

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