

The Political System

Section 2



MAIN IDEA

Interest groups work to persuade the government to adopt particular policies and address specific issues.

Key Terms

interest groups organizations of people with common interests that try to influence government policies and decisions

lobby an interest or pressure group

lobbyist person paid by a lobby or interest group to represent the group's interests

public-interest groups organizations that promote the interests of the general public

Section Summary

WHAT IS AN INTEREST GROUP?

Americans have the power to influence government policies. One way they do this is by voting. Another way is by forming **interest groups** based on common concerns to influence government policies and decisions. Because an interest group puts pressure on government, it is also called a **lobby**. A **lobbyist** works for an interest group or lobby to represent a group's concerns.

While a political party works to elect its candidates, an interest group focuses on government policies. There are different kinds of interest groups. Some interest groups focus on economic issues that affect businesses or industries, such as the American Farm Bureau Federation. Other interest groups focus on social issues or causes, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Still other interest groups, called **public-interest groups**, focus on the common good, such as groups that work to protect consumers or the environment.

List two ways that citizens influence government.

Underline three types of interest groups.

LOBBYISTS INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT

Many lobbyists work in Washington, D.C. Here, they are able to present arguments to Congress in favor of or against policies. For example, a labor group may argue to raise the minimum wage, while a business group may argue against this idea.

Lobbyists use different strategies to promote the interests of their lobbies. In addition to presenting arguments, they may ask members of Congress to sponsor bills. They may conduct research. They may help write bills. They may even provide information regarding public opinion.

In addition to influencing Congress, lobbyists may also influence public opinion through paid advertising, election support, and letter-writing campaigns. All in all, lobbyists try to gain public support for their causes, which will influence lawmakers to support legislation for the same causes.

Circle five strategies that lobbyists use to influence government.

INTERESTS GROUPS AND POWER

As long as interests groups work within the law, they may exert power over lawmakers and the public. The law requires that lobbyists register for whom they work and state how much money is being spent on lobbying efforts. Despite these regulations, some believe that lobbyists unfairly influence government in favor of organizations with large memberships and financial resources. Others view interest groups as an important way for people to participate in government.

Do you think interest groups are a positive aspect of government? Explain.

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Making Connections Create a diagram that illustrates the interest groups to which you belong. Consider the roles you play in society and the interests of each group—family member, student, consumer, and so on.

Section 2, *continued*

interest groups	lobby	lobbyist
public-interest groups		

DIRECTIONS Use the terms from the word bank to write an e-mail message to a member of Congress in support of a policy that will benefit an interest group to which you belong.
