

# EQ # 18- What are Interest Groups and what role do they play in US politics?

Chapter 11

# Key Information for Today

- What is an interest group?
- How is it different than a political party?
- What are some common interest groups involved in politics in the U.S. today?

# What do interest groups do?

- Discuss your answer with your table partner.
- What is lobbying? Is it legal in the US?

# What is an Interest Group?

- An interest group is an organization whose members share common concerns, and try to influence government policies that impact those concerns.
- Examples-
  - Corporations (Walmart) & Unions (NEA)
  - NRA, Sierra Club, NAACP

# What effect do Interest Groups have in U.S.?

- Americans are frequently concerned about the influence of "special interests" and their money on American politics.
- Is this a fair criticism?



# What are the Key Traits of Interest Groups ?

## Interest Groups

- Are numerous and growing in number
- 2018- 11,272 interest groups
- Gave \$2.6 billion



# How are Interest Groups Different than Parties?

## Political Parties

- Only TWO major parties
- Are policy GENERALISTS
- Strive to win elections
- Take a moderate stance on issues

## Interest Groups

- Are policy SPECIALISTS;
- Take a clear stance on certain issues;
- Seek to influence elected officials and to pass policy that favors their position

# Pair Share

- A. Explain the fundamental goal of political parties in the political process.
- B. Explain the fundamental goal of interest groups in the political process.



# Who are the top interest groups today?

- Look at the handout from Open Secrets
- Make FIVE observations from the data that inform your thinking about the role of interest groups in US Politics today.
- Record on LEFT side.

# Theories of Interest Group Politics

- Pluralist Theory
- Elite Theory
- Hyperpluralist Theory

Click on name to go to that slide.

# Theories of Interest Group Politics - Pluralism

- Pluralists

- Interest groups are important to healthy democracy because they allow people to mobilize in order to change policy.
- Because all must compete for influence, no one group will dominate.
- Groups have equal opportunity for influence because they have different resources at their disposal.



# Theories of Interest Group Politics - Elitism

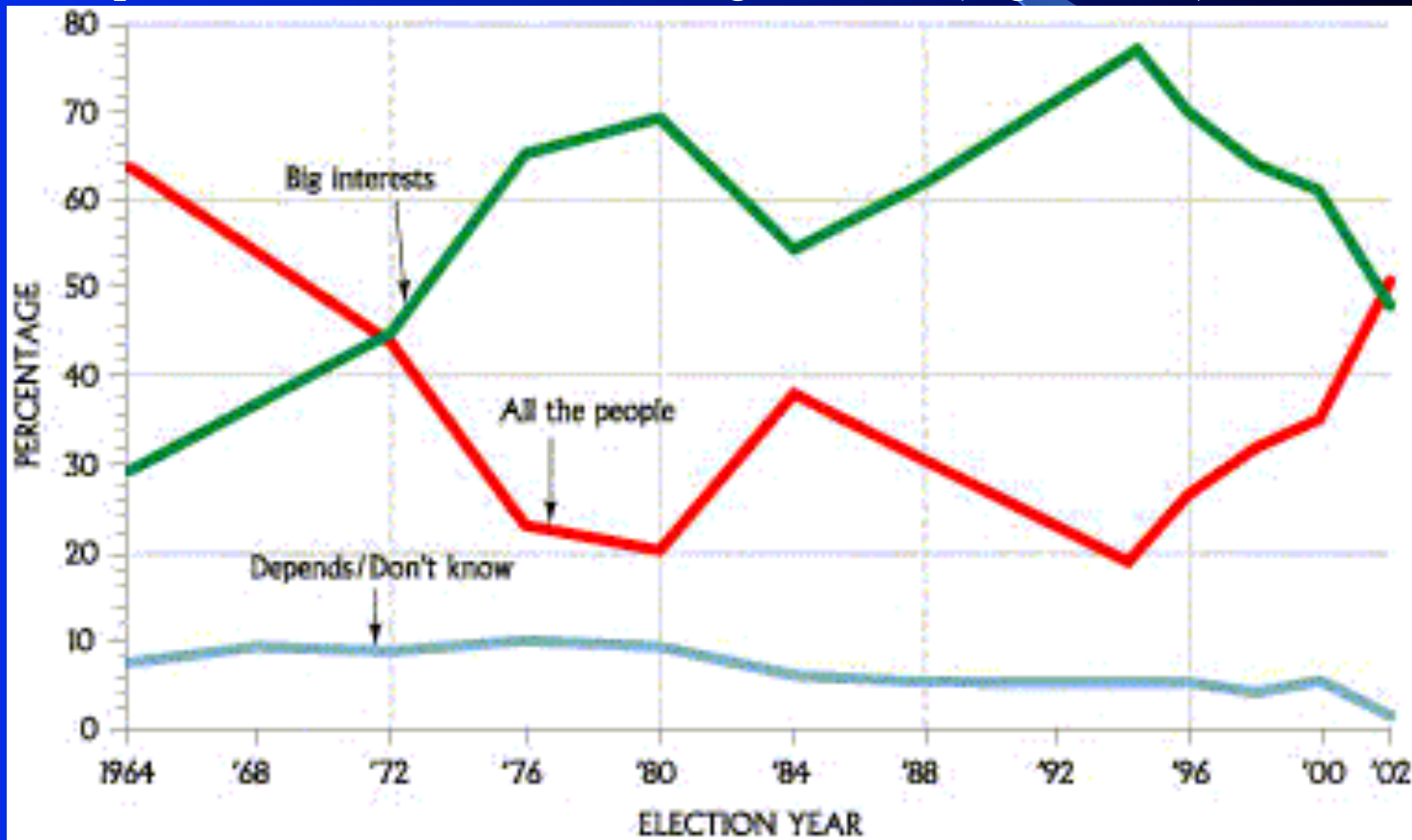
- Elite Theory:

- There may be many interest groups, but only a select few have any real power
- Elites, usually wealthy, are almost always favored over other interests
- Power rests mostly with large multinational corporations.
- Lobbying favors the wealthy



# Theories of Interest Group Politics – Elite Class Theory

- Perceptions of the Dominance of Big Interests (Figure 11.1)

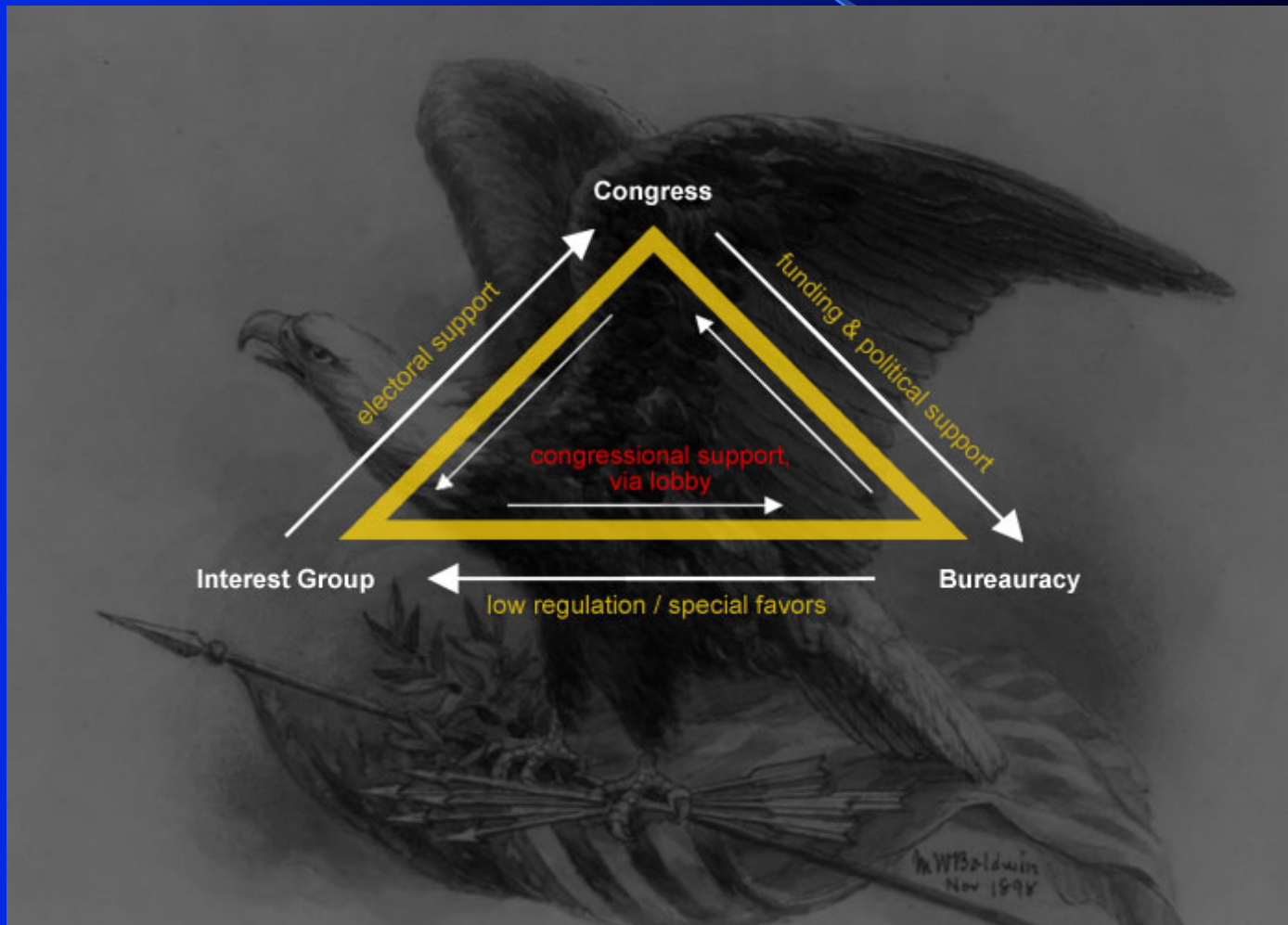


# Theories of Interest Group Politics - Hyperpluralism

- Hyperpluralism / Interest Group Liberalism:
  - Too many interest Groups have too much political influence on politicians and the political process
  - They usually get what they want
  - By avoiding having to choose between different policies, government creates conflicting policy that wastes time and money.



# Iron Triangles



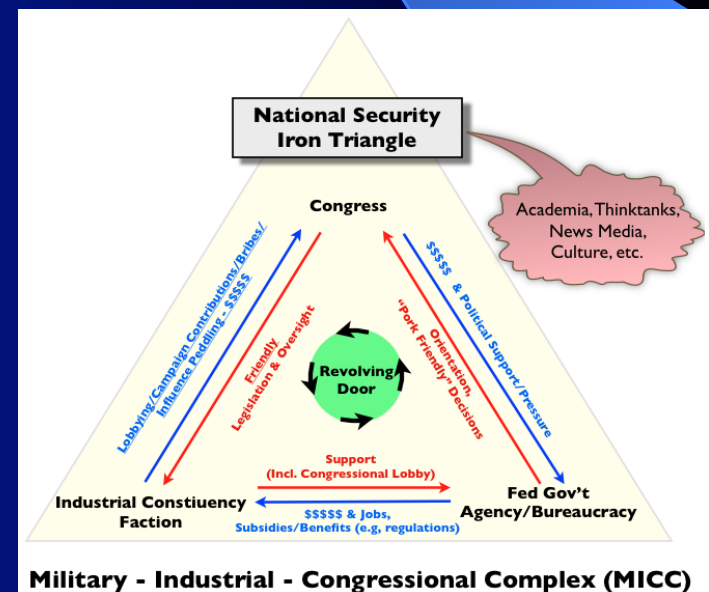
# What is an Iron Triangle?

- \*Also known as SUBGOVERNMENTS or ISSUE NETWORKS
- \*Is associated with HYPERPLURALISM theory
- \*Three key players work to pass laws that benefit themselves, NOT necessarily the US as a whole.



# How do Iron Triangles form?

- Iron Triangles form around key policy areas (defense, agriculture,...) that are technical and require expert knowledge—this makes them difficult to supervise.



# Who are the players in an Iron Triangle?

Iron Triangles / Sub governments consist of

1. An interest group

\*Examples- Sierra Club, Monsanto

2. A federal bureaucratic regulatory agency

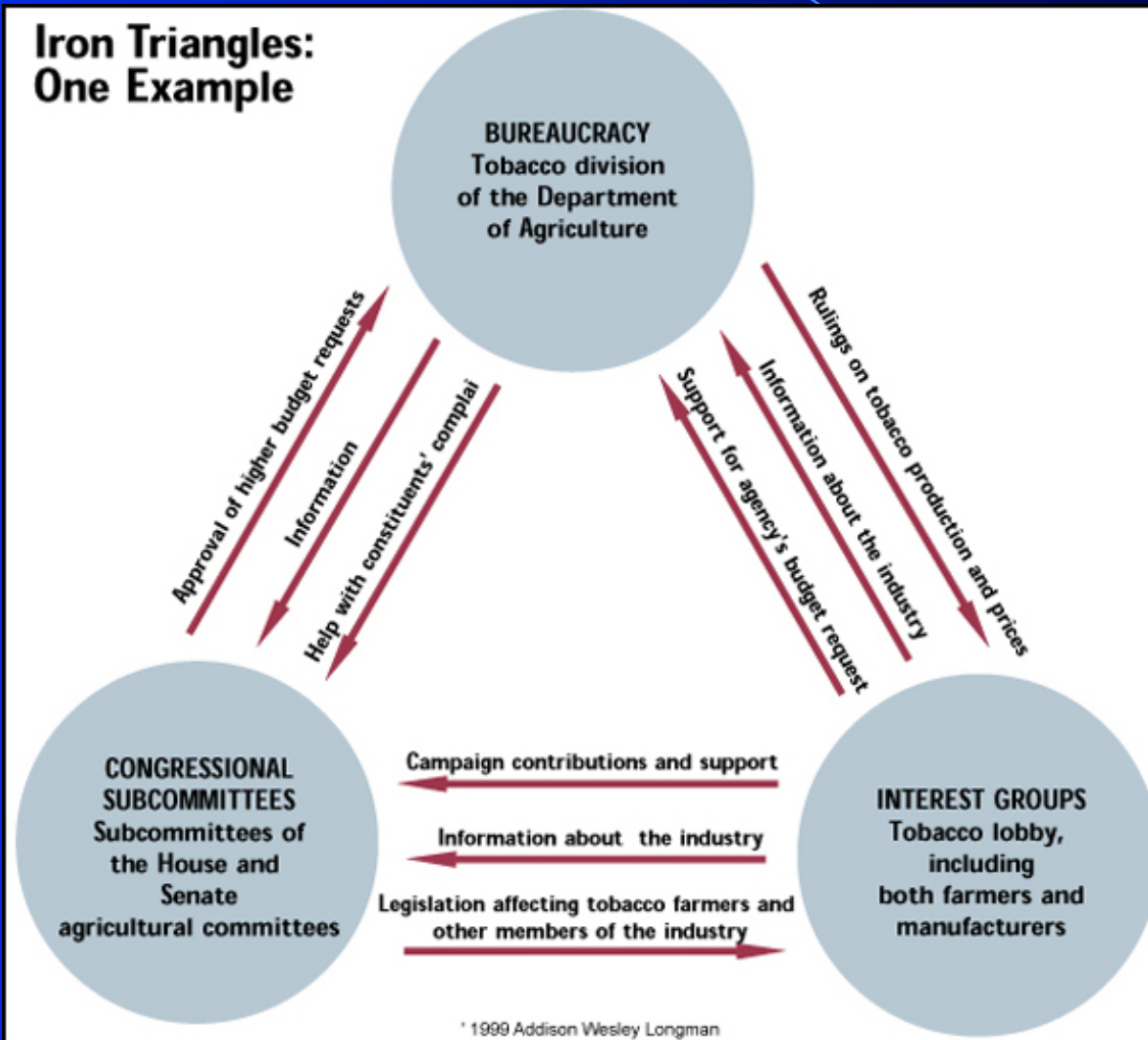
\*These are the agencies or departments in the executive branch who carry out the laws passed by Congress

\*Example- Environmental Protection Agency, Food and Drug Administration

3. A legislative / congressional committee or member of Congress, Agriculture committee

# Iron Triangle Example

## Iron Triangles: One Example



# Watch film clip on Iron Triangles

- [http://www.learner.org/courses/democracyinamerica/dia\\_14/dia\\_14\\_video.html](http://www.learner.org/courses/democracyinamerica/dia_14/dia_14_video.html)
- Why did members of Congress come to the defense of United Defense?
- What kinds of tactics did United Defense use to fend off efforts to kill Crusader?
- In the end, was United Defense successful?
- What is the iron triangle?

# Friday

- Finish Iron Triangles
- What makes an interest group successful?

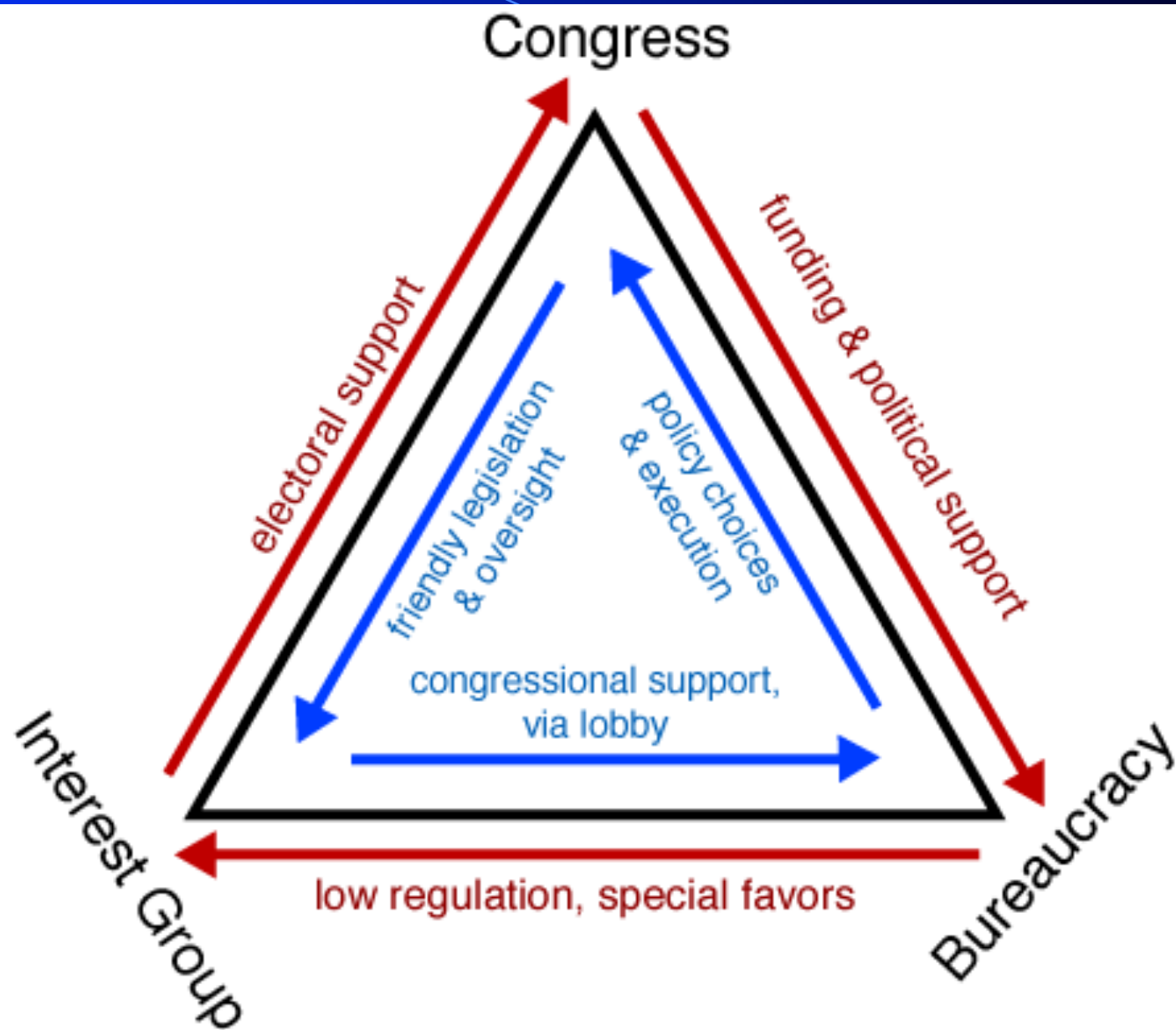
# Warm-UP

## Compare and Contrast

- Brainstorm a list of qualities for each. Try to have at least FIVE for each. Think of the goals for each, what they do, how they work, who belongs...

Interest Groups

Political Parties



# Example Iron Triangle

- Draw an iron triangle like the one on the handout.
- Write in the descriptions from the handout
- Now number 1-6 and explain how the example from the film fits each of these triangle arrows.



# Debrief

- What is an iron triangle?
- Who's involved?
- Are iron triangles good or bad for public policy? Defend your answer.

# Activity- Create your own Iron Triangle Example

- Read the handout about Iron Triangles
- Using the example from the film, draw out the players and their roles in an iron triangle in your INB.
- Players are United Defense (builder of the Crusader); Congressman JC Watts; US Army)

# Iron Triangle Examples

- Example- Boeing gets a sweet contract to build war planes for Department of Defense that costs tax payers without other companies submitting proposals to build. Boeing sets price.

# Iron Triangles- So What?

- Hyperpluralists believe iron triangles have a negative effect on policy
- Too many laws pass that benefit the members of the subgovernment but NOT citizens.
- There are NO CHECKS & BALANCES

# Monday

- What makes interest groups successful?
- What do interest groups do?
- Describe lobbying, electioneering, litigation, mobilizing public opinion

# Which Theory Would Say...

1. Lobbying is a problem because it benefits the privileged few at the expense of many.
2. Groups provide a link between people and the government and no one group is likely to become too dominant.
3. Groups have become too powerful and government tries to appease all interests that ask for something.

# What Factors Make an Interest Group Successful?

## 1. The Size of the Group

Small groups are more effective than large

- Can organize more easily
- Members more likely to experience the group's success and will work harder

Large groups are difficult to keep organized

# What is the Free Rider Problem?

Free-Rider problem affects LARGE groups

-Some members don't actively join interest groups because they benefit from the group's activities without officially joining.

**Olson's law of large groups-**

The bigger the group, the larger the free-rider problem





# What Makes an Interest Group Successful?

## 2. Intensity

How passionately the group feels about the issue matters

- Single-Issue groups have higher intensity  
Form around a specific policy; tend to pursue it without compromise.
  - Often deal with moral issues
  - Members often vote according to a candidate's stand on the group's issue

# What Makes an Interest Group Successful?

## 3. Financial Resources

- Not all groups have equal amounts of money.
- Politicians are most likely to serve the needs of groups with money
- Money allows groups to mobilize, conduct research and maintain an administrator.



Donald Trump

NRA WIN

\$30.3M



Richard Burr, NC

NRA WIN

\$6.3M



Marco Rubio, FL

NRA WIN

\$3.2M



Roy Blunt, MO

NRA WIN

\$3.0M



Todd Young, IN

NRA WIN

\$2.8M



Joe Heck, NV

NRA LOSS

\$2.5M



Rob Portman, OH

NRA WIN

\$2.2M

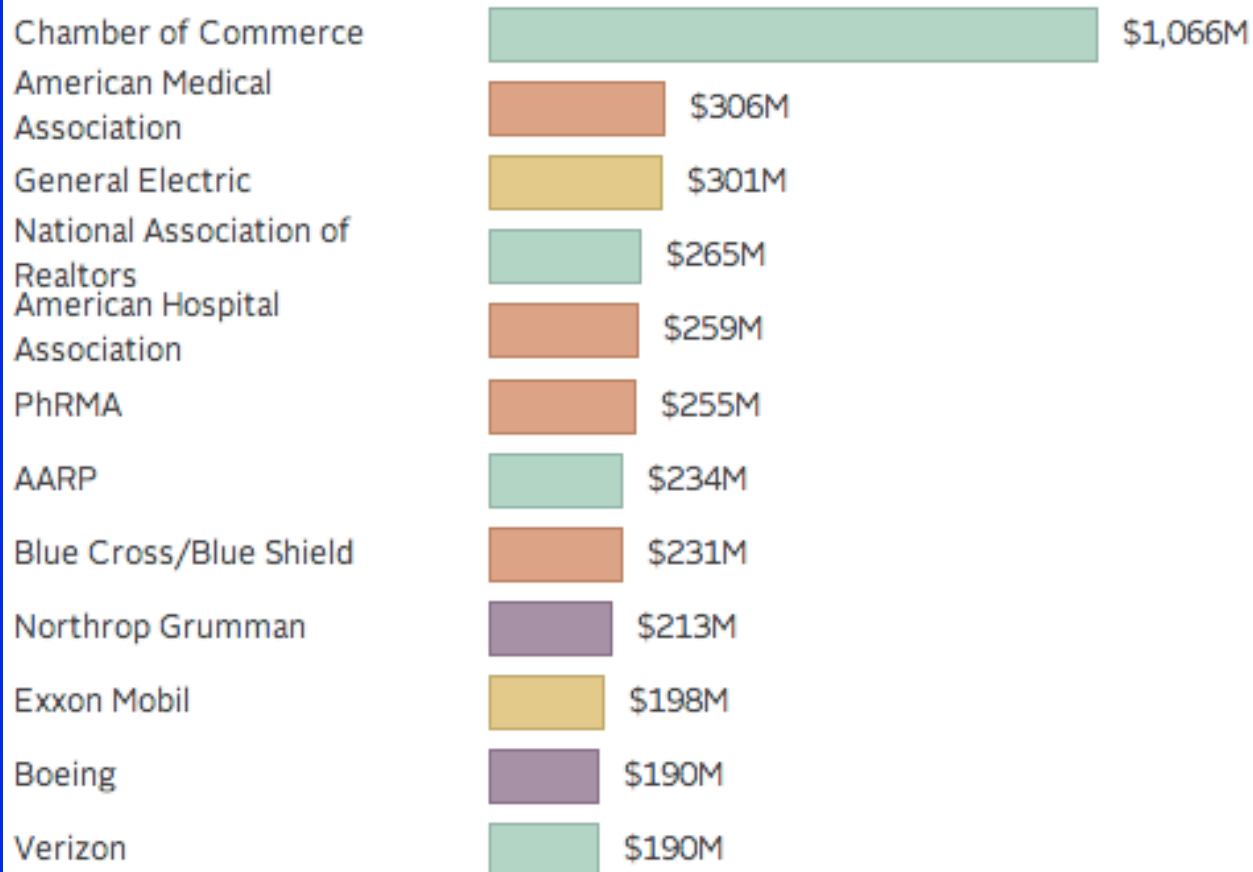
## THE NRA'S BIGGEST BETS

*The National Rifle Association allocated 96 percent of its total 2016 election spending — at least \$50.3M — to the presidential race and six Senate contests. Here's how the gamble paid off.*

SOURCE: FEC and OpenSecrets.org data



# Groups spending the most on federal lobbying, 1998-2014



Source: Center for Responsive Politics



# What do Interest Groups Do?

## LOBBYING

1. Lobbying- Interest groups work closely with members of Congress to shape policy

### Who are lobbyists?

- Professionals hired by interest groups who work to influence members of Congress on behalf of their group
- The more helpful they are, the more influence they have

# What do Lobbyists Do?

- Provide research & information
- Serve as policy experts
- Suggest policy
- Provide advice for legislators on how to craft  
policy/laws
- Pressure congress members

# What do Interest Groups do?

## ELECTIONEERING

- 2. Electioneering- Interest Groups
  - Endorse candidates who support their interest and work to get them elected.
  - Donate money directly and indirectly to get candidates elected
  - Most PAC money goes to incumbents.

# What do Interest Groups do?

## LITIGATION

- 3. Litigation- Using courts to win for their cause.
  - Use lawsuits to change policies that have already passed in Congress.
  - File *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) briefs in court cases to support their position.
  - File Class Action law suits on behalf of a large group of the electorate.



# What do Interest Groups do?

## MOBILIZING

### 4. Mobilizing public opinion-

#### Interest Groups

-Encourage public participation to advance their goals

- Influence voters to take action on their issues
- Get out the vote for candidates
- Organize public demonstrations

# Exit Ticket

1. Describe TWO factors that make an interest group more effective and ONE factor that tends to make them LESS effective.
2. What is the primary goal of an interest group?
3. Describe TWO methods interest groups use to achieve this goal.

# Quick Write / Summary

- A. Describe TWO different ways in which interest groups support the fundamental goal of political parties in the political process.
- B. For ONE of the forms of support you listed in A., explain TWO different ways in which that form of support helps interest groups achieve their fundamental goal in the political process.

# Research an Interest Group

- Pick an Issue and an Interest Group
- Use Project Vote Smart Site

<http://votesmart.org/interest-groups>

- Research and record
  - Name of interest group
  - Stated stance on issue
  - How many members
  - Which party supports them more and why (Dem or Rep)?
  - Funding-who and how much?

# Types of Interest Groups

## 1. Economic Interests

- Against regulations and tax increases
- Labor: protect workers' rights and benefits
- Business interests are most widely represented interests in Wash D.C.

## 2. Environmental Interests

- Fastest growing type of interest group
- Oppose policies that damage the environment

# Types of Interest Groups

## 3. Equality Interests

- Civil rights, women, social welfare
- Concerns around fair treatment in jobs, housing and education

## 4. Consumer and Public Interest

- Whole public benefits from these
- Product safety, children, mentally ill, animals

# Federalist #10

- What were the Federalist Papers?
- What was their purpose?
- Fed #10-What did Madison and others think about interest groups and political parties?
- Activity-
  - Read Fed. #10
  - Respond to Guided Questions
  - You will work with a partner to discuss but record your OWN answers.

# Warm- Up #18

## Federalist #10

1. What is a faction? Provide an example.
2. Why can't factions be prevented in a democracy?
3. What is a republic and why is it necessary, according to Madison?
4. How can we avoid the problems of factions? What's the best strategy?
5. Is Madison a Pluralist? How so?



# Understanding Interest Groups

- Interest Groups and Democracy
  - James Madison's solution to the problems posed by interest groups was to create a wide-open system in which groups compete.
  - Elite theorists point to the explosion of business PACs as evidence of interest group corruption.
  - Hyperpluralists maintain that group influence has led to policy gridlock.