

## Chapter 11

# Interest Groups

### REVIEWING THE CHAPTER

#### CHAPTER FOCUS

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the wide variety of interest groups or lobbies that operate in the United States and to assess the effect they have on the political system of the country. After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter, you should be able to do each of the following:

1. Explain why the characteristics of American society and government encourage a multiplicity of interest groups, and compare the American and British experiences in this regard.
2. Describe the historical conditions under which interest groups are likely to form, and specify the kinds of organizations Americans are most likely to join.
3. Describe relations between leaders and rank-and-file members of groups, including why the sentiments of members may not determine the actions of leaders.
4. Describe several methods that interest groups use to formulate and carry out their political objectives, especially the lobbying techniques used to gain public support. Explain why courts have become an important forum for public-interest groups.
5. List the laws regulating conflict of interest, and describe the problems involved with “revolving door” government employment. Describe the provisions of the 1978 conflict-of-interest law. Explain the suggestions that have been made for stricter laws. Describe the balance between the First Amendment’s freedom of expression and the need to prevent corruption in the political system.

#### STUDY OUTLINE

- I. Explaining proliferation: why interest groups are common in the United States
  - A. Many kinds of cleavage in the country
  - B. Constitution makes for many access points
  - C. Public laws favor the non-profit sector
  - D. Political parties are weak
- II. The birth of interest groups
  - A. Periods of rapid growth
    1. Since 1960, 70 percent have established an office in Washington, D.C.
    2. 1770s, independence groups
    3. 1830s and 1840s, religious, antislavery groups
    4. 1860s, craft unions
    5. 1880s and 1890s, business associations
    6. 1900s and 1910, most major lobbies of today

#### B. Factors explaining the rise of interest groups

1. Broad economic developments create new interests
  - a) Farmers produce cash crops
  - b) Mass production industries begin
2. Government policy itself
  - a) Created veterans' groups—wars
  - b) Encouraged formation of Farm Bureau
  - c) Launched Chamber of Commerce
  - d) Favored growth of unions
3. Emergence of strong leaders, usually at certain times
4. Expanding role of government

### III. Kinds of organizations

#### A. Institutional interests

1. Defined: individuals or organizations representing other organizations
2. Types
  - a) Businesses: example, General Motors
  - b) Trade or governmental associations
3. Concerns—bread-and-butter issues of concern to their clients
  - a) Clearly defined, with homogeneous groups
  - b) Diffuse, with diversified groups
4. Other interests—governments, foundations, universities

#### B. Membership interests

1. Americans join some groups more frequently than people in other nations
  - a) Social, business, and so on, same rate as elsewhere
  - b) Unions, less likely to join
  - c) Religious or civic groups, more likely to join
  - d) Greater sense of efficacy and duty explains the tendency to join civic groups
2. Most sympathizers do not join because
  - a) Individuals not that significant
  - b) Benefits flow to nonmembers too

#### C. Incentives to join

1. Solidary incentives—pleasure, companionship (League of Women Voters, AARP, NAACP, Rotary, etc.)
2. Material incentives—money, things, services (farm organizations, retired persons, etc.)
3. Purpose of the organization itself—public-interest organizations
  - a) Ideological interest groups' appeal is controversial principles
  - b) Engage in research and bring lawsuits

#### D. Influence of the staff

1. Many issues affect different members differently
2. Issues may be irrelevant to those joining for solidary or material benefits
3. Group efforts may reflect opinion of staff more than general membership

### IV. Interest groups and social movements

#### A. Social movement is a widely shared demand for change

#### B. Environmental movement

#### C. Feminist movement: three kinds

1. Solidary—LWV and others (widest support)
2. Purposive—NOW, NARAL (strong position on divisive issues)
3. Caucus—WEAL (material benefits)

#### D. Union movement

1. Major movement occurred in the 1930s

2. Peak around 1945
3. Steady decline since, today about 10 percent of all workers
4. Explanations for the decline
  - a) Shift from industrial production to service delivery
  - b) Decline in popular approval of unions
5. Growth in unions composed of government workers

#### V. Funds for interest groups

- A. Expansion and cutbacks in federal grants affect interest groups
  1. Support for projects undertaken
    - a) Largely for-profit benefit when grants are awarded for services they provide
    - b) Performance audits of independent research evaluations rarely follow
    - c) Recipients rarely change
  2. Efforts by Reagan and Bush to cut back and increase funds
  3. Business and federal contracts
- B. Direct mail
  1. Unique to modern interest groups through use of computers
  2. Common cause a classic example
  3. Techniques
    - a) Teaser
    - b) Emotional arousal
    - c) Celebrity endorsement
    - d) Personalization of letter

#### VI. Problem of bias

- A. Reasons for belief in upper-class bias
  1. More affluent more likely to join
  2. Business or professional groups more numerous; better financed
- B. Why these facts do not decide the issue
  1. Describe inputs but not outputs
  2. Business groups often divided among themselves
- C. Important to ask what the bias is
  1. Many conflicts are within upper middle class
  2. Resource differentials are clues, not conclusions

#### VII. Activities of interest groups

- A. Information
  1. Single most important tactic
    - a) Nonpolitical sources insufficient
    - b) Provide detailed, current information
  2. Most effective on narrow, technical issues
  3. Officials also need cues; ratings systems
  4. Dissemination of information and cues via fax
- B. Public support: rise of new politics
  1. Outsider strategy replacing insider strategy
  2. New strategy leads to controversy that politicians dislike
  3. Key targets: the undecided
  4. Some groups attack their likely allies to embarrass them
  5. Legislators sometimes buck public opinion, unless issue important
  6. Some groups try for grassroots support
    - a) Saccharin issue
    - b) "Dirty Dozen" environmental polluters
  7. Few large, well-funded interests are all-powerful (e.g., NRA)

### C. Money and PACs

1. Money is least effective way to influence politicians
2. Campaign finance reform law of 1973 had two effects
  - a) Restricted amount interest groups can give to candidates
  - b) Made it legal for corporations and unions to create PACs
3. Rapid growth in PACs has not led to vote buying
  - a) More money is available on all sides
  - b) Members of Congress take money but still decide how to vote
4. Almost any organization can create a PAC
  - a) More than half of all PACs sponsored by corporations
  - b) Recent increase in ideological PACs; one-third liberal, two-thirds conservative
5. Ideological PACs raise more but spend less because of cost of raising money
6. In 2000 unions and business organizations gave most
7. Incumbents get most PAC money
  - a) Business PACs split money between Democrats and Republicans
  - b) Democrats get most PAC money
8. PAC contributions small
9. No evidence PAC money influences votes in Congress
  - a) Most members vote their ideology
  - b) When issue of little concern to voters, slight correlation but may be misleading
  - c) PAC money may influence in other ways, such as access
  - d) PAC money most likely to influence on client politics

### D. The revolving door

1. Individuals leave important jobs in the federal government and go into lucrative positions in private industry
2. Some become lobbyists and there are concerns
  - a) Improper influence
  - b) Promise of positions upon leaving government
3. Some prominent examples, especially in the procurement process

### E. Trouble

1. Disruption always part of American politics
2. Used by groups of varying ideologies
3. Better accepted since 1960s
4. History of proper persons using disruption: suffrage, civil rights, antiwar movements
5. Officials dread no-win situation

## VIII. Regulating interest groups

### A. Protection by First Amendment

### B. 1946 law accomplished little in requiring registration

### C. 1995 lobby act enacted by Congress

1. Broadens definition of a lobbyist
2. Lobbyists must report twice annually
  - a) The names of clients
  - b) Their income and expenditures
  - c) The issues on which they worked
3. Exempts grassroots organizations
4. No enforcement organization created

### D. 2007 reforms by Democrats

1. Gifts from registered lobbyists or firms that employ them
2. Reimbursement for travel costs from registered lobbyists or firms that employ them

3. Reimbursements for travel for trips organized or requested by registered lobbyists or firms that employ them

E. Impact of reforms?

1. Rules will probably be enforced “strictly speaking”
2. Exceptions, loopholes and need for clarification
3. Still room for evasion and abuse

F. Significant restraints prior to 1995 still in effect

1. Tax code: threat of losing tax exempt status
2. Campaign finance laws