



University of Virginia Center for Politics



Interest Groups and the Political Process Post-*Citizens United*

Purpose: Interest groups are an integral part of American democracy providing citizens a means to influence elections through collective action. One of the primary functions of interest groups in the political process is to promote or oppose issues and candidates, particularly by contributing to political campaigns and in some cases, sponsoring “issue ads.” The tremendous influx of cash after the recent *Citizens United v. FEC* Supreme Court decision has had significant consequences on the political process. This lesson focuses on the influence exerted by interest groups through the funding of political campaigns, and can be used as a stand-alone lesson or in conjunction with “Special Interest Groups and Lobbying: Influence on the Legislative Process” lesson plan.

Objectives:

1. Students will define “interest groups” and explain their role in the political process.
2. Students will describe the function of Political Action Committee’s (PACs) and identify several examples in recent elections.
3. Students will recognize key terms related to campaign finance and explain potential problems related to each.
4. Students will evaluate the purpose and effectiveness of campaign finance laws.
5. Students will investigate the impact of key U.S. Supreme Court decisions on campaign finance.
6. Students will research and then debate the pro’s and con’s of the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision.

Key Words:

Interest groups

“Issue ads”

501c groups

McConnell v. F.E.C.

Hard money

527 groups

Buckley v. Valeo

Super PACs

Soft money

Political Action Committees

Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act

Citizens United v. F.E.C.

Materials:

1. *Money Lyrics Student Handout*
2. *The Role of Interests Groups in the Political Process Student Handout and Teacher Key*
3. *Campaign Finance Guide Student Handout*
4. *Citizens United v. F.E.C. Open Forum Student Handout*
5. *Citizens United Open Forum Source Analysis Graphic Organizer Student Handout*
6. *Political Cartoons Student Handout*

Procedures:

1. **School of Rock: *Money* by Pink Floyd** – Pass out the *Money* lyrics, and play the song (can download on iTunes), or project the music video
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykuvHnNGHNc>
 - a. After students watch the music video, ask them to interpret the lyrics in their own words.
 - b. With a partner or small group, students should address the questions below:
 - *Money* was written in 1973. Considering the music and lyrics, what is the overall message of the song? (NOTE: You may include references to the images from the Pink Floyd Music video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykuvHnNGHNc>)
 - In what ways is the song *Money* relevant to America today?
 - Today's topic is the influence of special interest money on the political process, and the government's sometimes well-intentioned but often ineffective attempts to curb its effects. Explain how the song *Money* relates to the influx of special interest money into political campaigns.
2. **Let's Review: What are Interest Groups and What do They do?** - This activity is intended as a quick review of the definition and role interest groups play in the political process
 - a. Pass out "The Role of Interest Groups on the Political Process" graphic organizer.
 - b. Project the first three slides of the Interest Group and the Political Process which define the term "interest groups," and highlight the roles interest groups play in the political process.
3. **"Show Me the Money": Interest Groups and the Political Process Post-Citizens United** – Project the "Show Me the Money" PowerPoint to provide students with information about campaign finance laws and key Supreme Court cases (including the recent *Citizens United* decision) regarding the contributions of Political Action Committees to elections.
 NOTE: Teachers may want to give students the "Campaign Finance Guide" beforehand to save time.
4. **Open Forum: The Debate over *Citizens United v. FEC*** – Pass out the directions for the "Does *Citizen United v. F.E.C.* Threaten Democracy" Open Forum and the Source Analysis Graphic Organizer.
 - a. Divide the class into two teams for the purpose of the open forum:
 - Team 1 [Pro]: *Citizen United* protects our First Amendment right of free speech.
 - Team 2 [Con]: *Citizens United* threatens democracy.
 - b. Preparation: Students on each team will research information from several sources that supports their position individually, and then share their findings with the rest of the team. Each group then chooses a leader to argue their case in the open forum.
 - c. Opening Statements: Leaders from each side present their arguments supported by evidence.
 - d. Rebuttal: The debate is then open to the whole class to provide rebuttals to the other side's arguments and present any new evidence to be considered.



- e. Debriefing: At the end of the open forum, bring the class back together and ask students to step away from their roles as they address the following questions:
 - What do you think about the Court's contention that corporations and labor unions have 1st Amendment rights of free speech to contribute an unlimited amount of money to influence elections?
 - What impact do you think *Citizens United* had on the 2012 presidential election?
 - Based on the *Citizens United* decision, what do you think is likely to happen in the future regarding money in political campaigns?
5. **Making Connections: Analyzing Political Cartoons** - Break students into groups- give each a cartoon, have them analyze and present. Or you may choose to project the political cartoons via PowerPoint.

Ask students to interpret the cartoon:

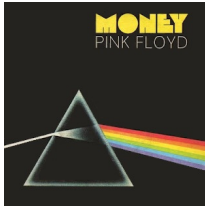
 - a. Describe what's going on in the political cartoon (Who? What? When? Where?)
 - b. Identify any symbols (ex: an elephant to represent the Republican Party) portrayed in the cartoon and analyze what they represent.
 - c. What is the artist's message in the cartoon? What do you think?
 - d. Explain what this cartoon tells us about special interest money in political campaigns after the *Citizens United* decision.

Appendix: "Show Me the Money": Interest Groups and the Political Process Post-*Citizens United* – a resource for teachers that includes many of the important content elements of the lesson.

Extension Activities:

Stephen Colbert's SuperPac – Use Stephen Colbert's SuperPAC to illustrate "how big money has taken over elections" after the *Citizen United* decision.

- a. Show the video clip *Jon Stewart to Oversee Stephen Colbert SuperPAC* [Comedian Stephen Colbert formed a "SuperPac" during the 2012 Republican primaries - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AugSELPyNSo>]
- b. Class discussion questions after the clip:
 - According to the video clip, what rules govern SuperPacs?
 - How have campaigns found ways around these rules?
 - What do you think is Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart's purpose in forming the Colbert SuperPAC?
 - How have SuperPACs changed political campaigns



MONEY

Music and lyrics by Roger Walters
Recorded by Pink Floyd (1973)



Directions: Music lyrics are often considered a form of poetry that reflect the history and culture of a particular time period. In the column on the left, translate/interpret the lyrics into your own words (NOTE: you don't have to make your words rhyme).

Money, get away
Get a good job with good pay and you're okay
Money, it's a gas
Grab that cash with both hands and make a stash
New car, caviar, four star daydream
Think I'll buy me a football team

Money, get back
I'm all right Jack keep your hands off of my stack
Money, it's a hit
Don't give me that do goody good bull****
I'm in the high-fidelity first class traveling set
And I think I need a Lear jet

Money, it's a crime
Share it fairly but don't take a slice of my pie
Money, so they say
Is the root of all evil today
But if you ask for a raise it's no surprise
That they're giving none away
Away, away, way
Away, away, away

Money in your own words:

Verse One:

Verse Two:

Verse Three:

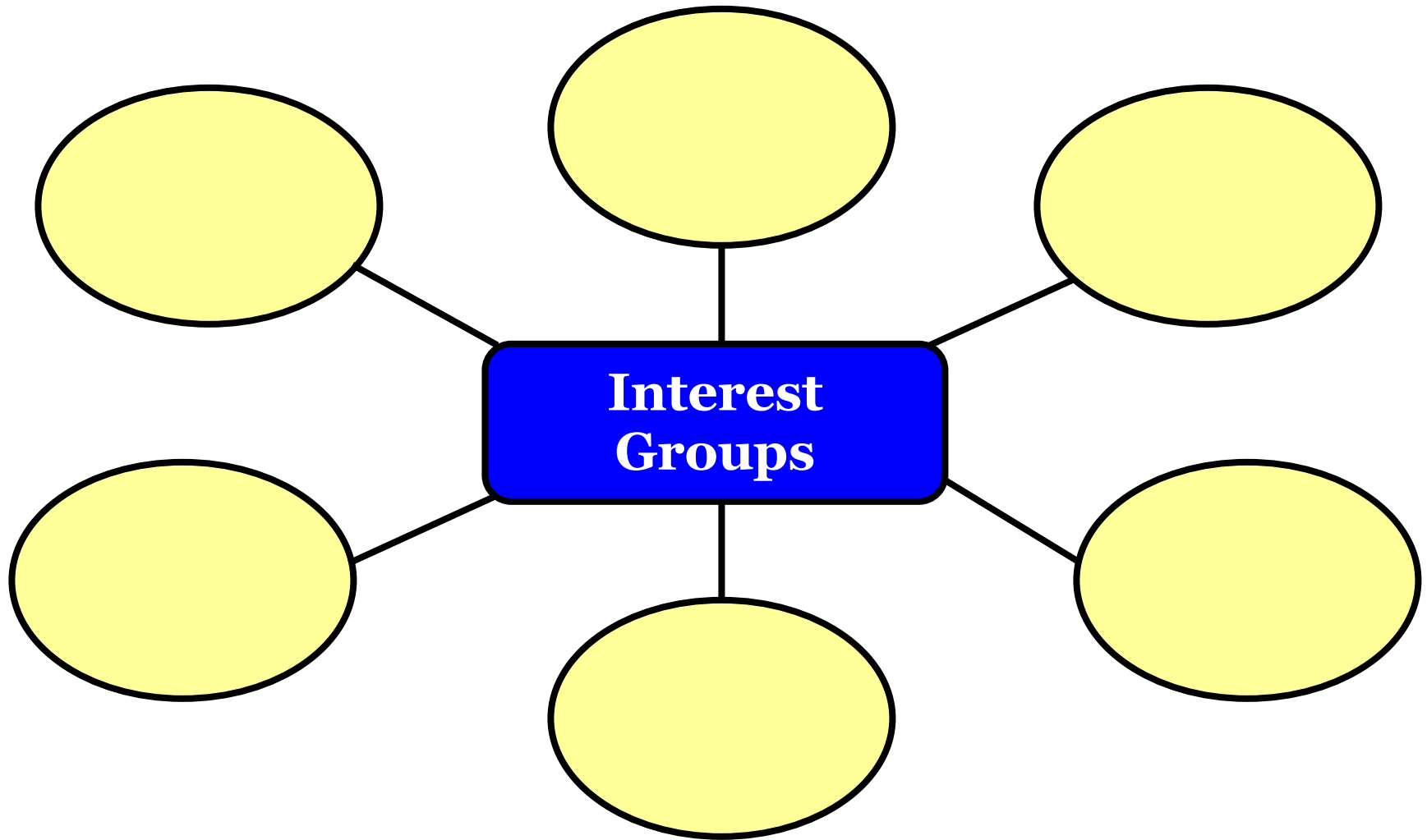


Money Discussion Questions – With a partner or small group, address the questions below:

1. Share with you partner or group your translation or interpretation of the lyrics.
2. *Money* was written in 1973. Considering the music and lyrics, what is the overall message of the song?
(NOTE: You may include references to the images from the Pink Floyd Music video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykuvHnNGHNc>)
3. In what ways is the song *Money* relevant to America today?
4. Today's topic is the influence of special interest money on the political process, and the government's sometimes well-intentioned but often ineffective attempts to curb its effects. Explain how the song *Money* relates to the influx of special interest money into political campaigns.



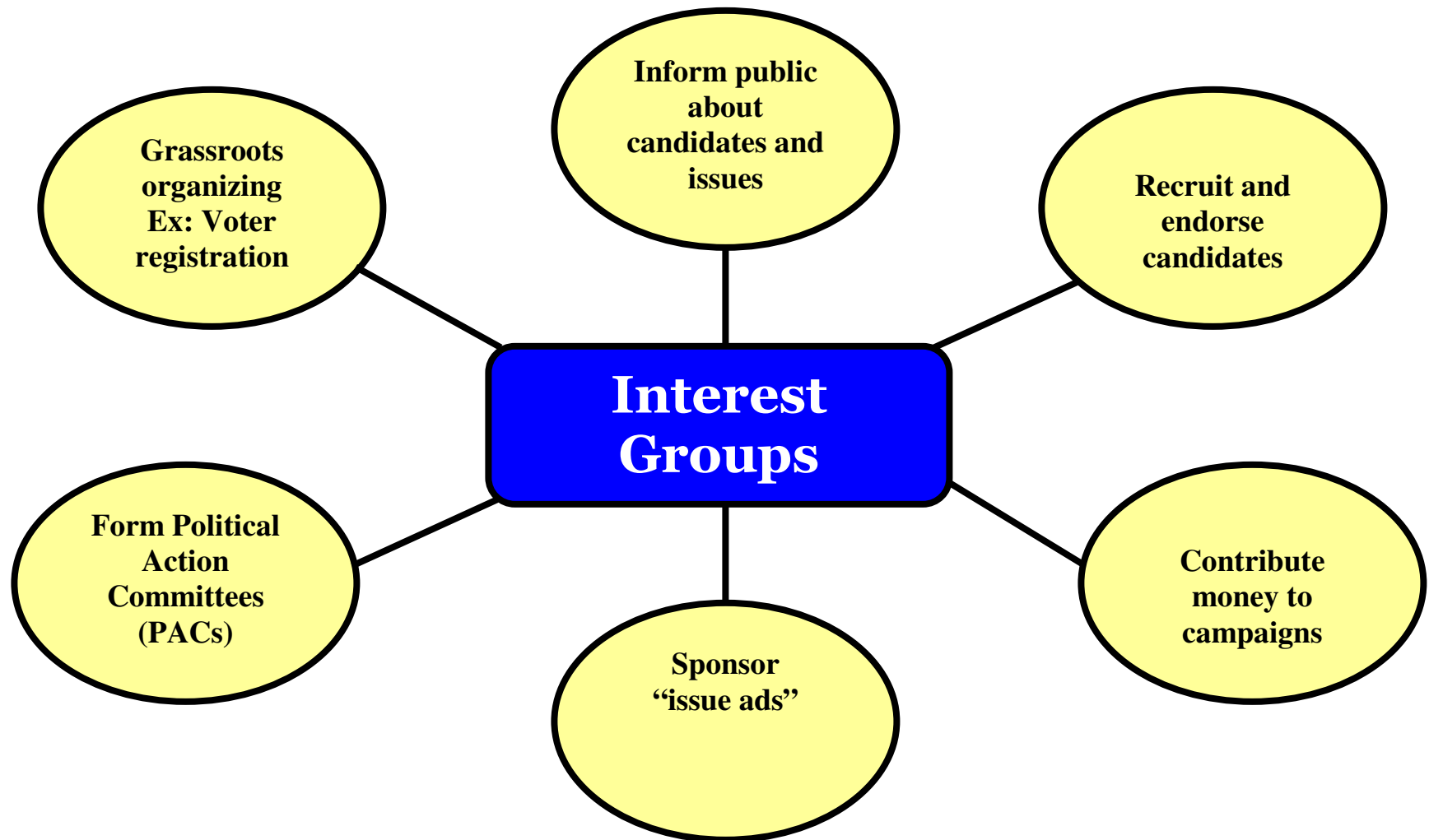
The Role of Interests Groups in the Political Process



Interest Groups –



The Role of Interests Groups in the Political Process



Interest Groups – Organizations of people sharing a common interest or goal that seek to influence government policy and elections



CAMPAIGN FINANCE GUIDE



I. Key Campaign Finance Vocabulary

- *Hard Money* – campaign contributions regulated and limited by the federal government that are given directly to a candidate
- *Soft Money* – unlimited and unregulated campaign contributions to federal candidates and the national parties. Supposedly for generic “party building” activities (ex: get-out-the-vote drives, bumper stickers, yard signs, and “issue ads”)
- *Political Action Committee (PAC)* – officially registered fund-raising organization that represents interest groups in the political process.
- *527 Groups* – Tax-exempt organizations created to raise money for political activities such as voter mobilization efforts and issue ads
- *501c Groups* – Nonprofit, tax-exempt interest groups that can engage in varying levels of political activity
- *Super PACs* - PACs may raise and spend unlimited sums of money in order to advocate for or against political candidates.

II. Important Campaign Finance Laws

- *Tillman Act (1907)* – the first legislation in the United States prohibiting monetary contribution to national political campaigns by corporations.
- *Federal Election Campaign Act (1971, 1974)* – increased disclosure of contributions for federal campaigns and 1974 amendments placed legal limits on the campaign contributions.
- *Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (a.k.a. McCain-Feingold Act)* – banned national parties and officeholders from raising and spending “soft money,” and prohibited corporations and unions from funding “electioneering communications” within 30 days before a primary or 60 days before a general election.

III. Campaign Finance Supreme Court Decisions

- *Buckley v. Valeo (1976)* – candidates spending money to finance their own campaigns is a form of constitutionally protected free speech through the 1st Amendment
- *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission (2003)* - upheld most of BCRA ruling that restrictions on free speech justified by government’s interest to prevent corruption in campaigns
- *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010)* – ruled spending is protected speech under the 1st Amendment and the government cannot prohibit spending by corporations and labor unions to support or denounce individual candidates in elections



DOES *CITIZEN UNITED V. F.E.C.* THREATEN DEMOCRACY?

Open Forum
AP Gov/Ms. Strong



Directions:

In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Citizens United v. F.E.C.* that political spending by corporations and labor unions is a form of protected speech under the first amendment. This decision has sparked great debate over the appropriate application of the First Amendment and the inherent fairness of unlimited money injected into political campaigns. This activity requires you to consider the pro's and con's of the *Citizen United* decision. You will use sources like the majority and dissenting opinions of the U.S. Supreme Court, relevant articles and video clips to build your argument for the open forum. The class will be divided into two large teams, pro and con, to prepare for and then debate the following sides:

Side A [Pro]: *Citizen United* protects our First Amendment right of free speech.

Versus

Side B [Con]: *Citizens United* threatens democracy.

Open Forum:

Each student will be assigned to one side of the argument: in favor of the Electoral College system or against it. You personal feelings about this topic are irrelevant for the purpose of this activity!!!!

- I. Preparation (30-45 minutes) – The class will be divided into both large pro or con teams, and subgroups with that. Each small group will brainstorm as many arguments as possible to support its position. The group will then choose a leader who will argue the groups class in the formal debate.
- II. Opening Statements (3-4 minutes per team) – Each group presents its side and supporting arguments.
- III. Rebuttal (open to the whole class) – The debate is then opened up to all participants with the following ground rules:
 - a) No person may speak twice until everyone has spoken once.
 - b) Sides will alternate comments (if pro person speaks a con person must go next).
 - c) The speaker will choose the next person.

Assessment:

At the end of class, each student will be given a grade based on the quality of her/his participation in the open forum (see attached Open Forum Assessment Rubric)

Recommended Sources:

- *Citizens United v. F.E.C.* Majority Opinion Summary - http://www.oyez.org/cases/2000-2009/2008/2008_08_205
- *Citizens United v. F.E.C.* Majority Opinion Text (Justice Kennedy) - <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/08-205.ZS.html>
- *Citizens United v. F.E.C.* Dissenting Opinion (Justice Stevens) - <http://www.patriotsforchange.net/about-us/citizens-united---stevens-dissent-summary>
- “Debating *Citizens United*: Remember the First Amendment?” - <http://www.thenation.com/article/157720/debating-citizens-united#axzz2YAPi2Dhu>
- “Debating *Citizens United*: Corporations Aren’t People” - <http://www.thenation.com/article/157720/debating-citizens-united?page=0,1#axzz2YAPi2Dhu>
- “A Year Later, *Citizens United* Reshapes Politics” - <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/21/133083209/a-year-later-citizens-united-reshapes-politics>
- Bill of Rights and First Amendment - http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html
- “The Federalist No. 10” (James Madison) - <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm>
- Video clip: “Justice Scalia on *Citizens United*” - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgQGJjQq4uk>
- Video clip: “Keith Olbermann Comments on *Citizens United*” - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5Qvrs8Z_N8&list=PLC30A49C12826E4EC
- Video clip: “*Citizens United v. FEC* – what it means for democracy” - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nz6LVYD4As>



Open Forum Assessment Rubric

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Debate Topic: _____

Grade =

Grading Rubric: 5 = A+ - A; 4 = A- -B+; 3 = B - B-; 2 = C+ - C; 1 = C- - D-; 0 = F

- 5 Demonstrates superior knowledge of assigned side of the issue, as well as understanding of the other side; uses numerous specific details, examples and evidence from the relevant sources; very effectively applies outside information and insight to the discussion; shows outstanding analytical skills; exhibits very high degree of focus on the task at hand.
- 4 Demonstrates very good knowledge of assigned side of the issue; uses a number details, specific examples and evidence from relevant sources; effectively applies outside information and insight to the discussion; shows very good analytical skills; exhibits a high degree of focus on the task at hand.
- 3 Demonstrates knowledge of assigned side of the issue; uses some details and specific examples and evidence from the article as well as outside information; applies outside information and insight to the discussion; shows good analytical skills; exhibits good degree of focus on the task at hand.
- 2 Demonstrates general knowledge of assigned issue; uses relatively few details and specific examples; applies little outside information and insight to the discussion; shows fair analytical skills; somewhat unfocused on the task at hand.
- 1 Little knowledge of content demonstrated; unprepared; very little participation.
- 0 Did not participate

Feedback and Comments:



CITIZEN UNITED V. F.E.C. OPEN FORUM
Source Analysis Graphic Organizer

Student Handout

Directions – As you read through your sources in preparation for the open forum, record important pieces of evidence that support each side, and identify key points you want to make during the debate. HINT: be sure that you anticipate arguments from the other side.

Source	Evidence Supporting Side A	Evidence Supporting Side B	Key Debate or Rebuttal Points



Source	Evidence Supporting Side A	Evidence Supporting Side B	Key Debate or Rebuttal Points

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Political Cartoon #1



Title: The Supreme Court's "First Amendment Decision

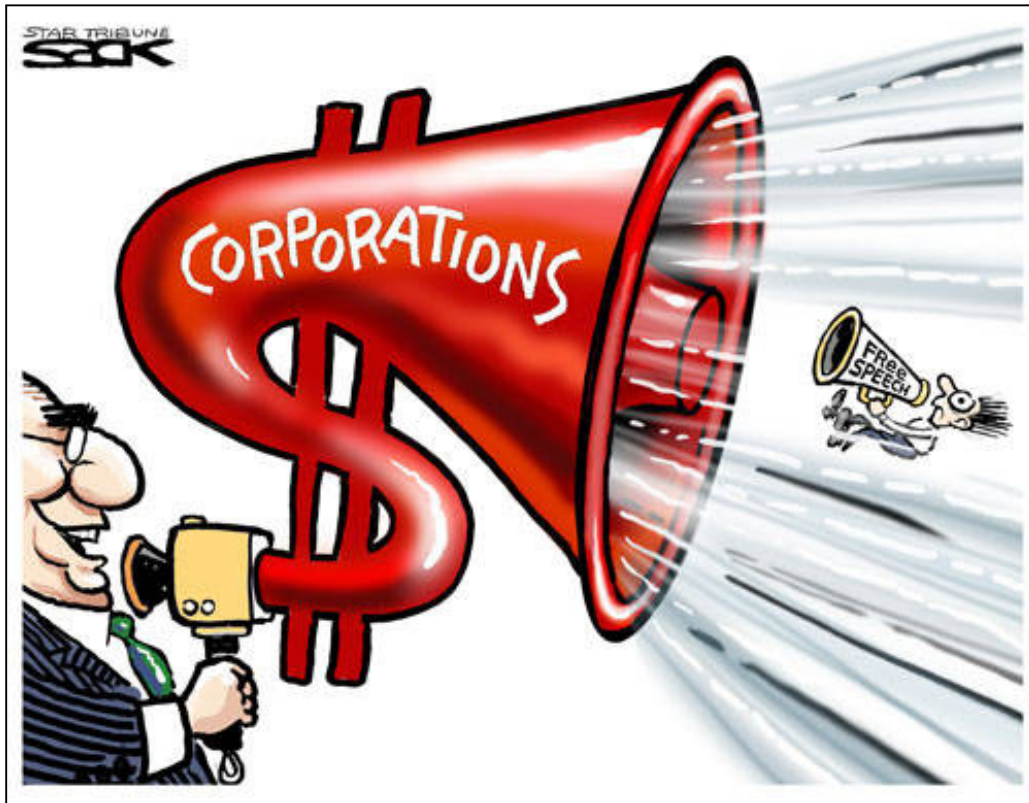
Artist: Adam Zyglis, *The Buffalo News*

Date: 10/28/10

Source: <http://theragblog.blogspot.com/2010/10/david-p-hamilton-citizens-united-and.html>

1. Describe what's going on in the political cartoon (Who? What? When? Where?).
2. Identify any symbols (ex: an elephant to represent the Republican Party) portrayed in the cartoon and analyze what they represent.
3. What is the artist's message in the cartoon? What do you think?
4. Explain what this cartoon tells us about special interest money in political campaigns after the Citizens United decision.

Political Cartoon #2



Title: Corporations and Free Speech

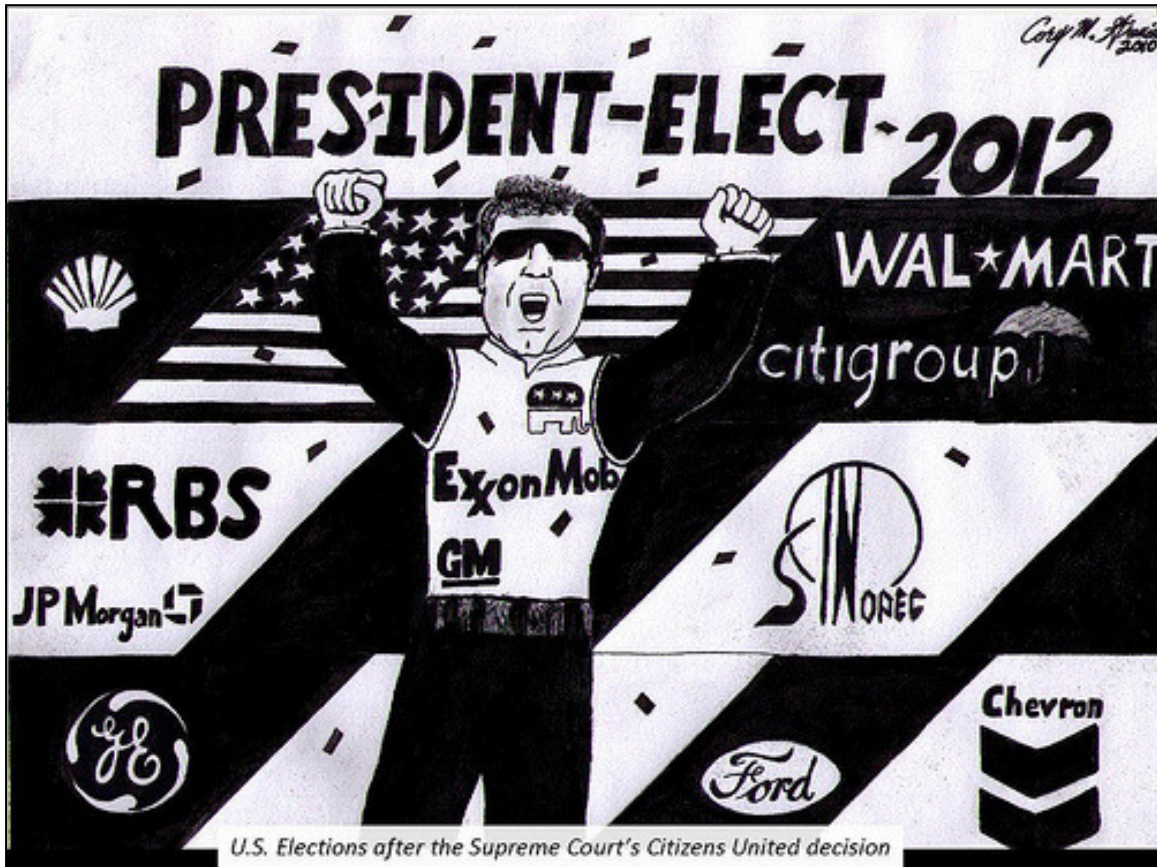
Artist: Steve Sack, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

Date: 1/17/12

Source: <http://jobsanger.blogspot.com/2012/01/can-brown-warren-keep-special-interest.html>

- e. Describe what's going on in the political cartoon (Who? What? When? Where?).
- f. Identify any symbols (ex: an elephant to represent the Republican Party) portrayed in the cartoon and analyze what they represent.
- g. What is the artist's message in the cartoon? What do you think?
- h. Explain what this cartoon tells us about special interest money in political campaigns after the Citizens United decision.

Political Cartoon #3



Title: U.S. Elections after the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision

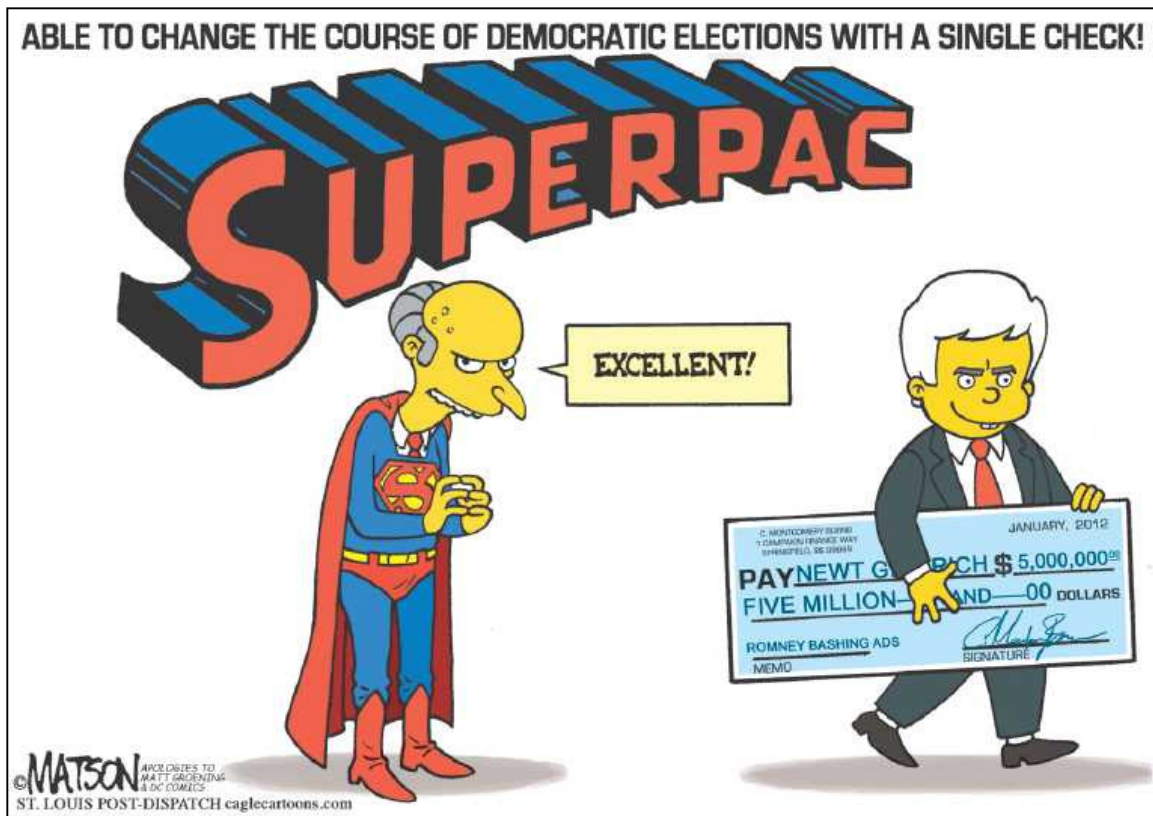
Artist: Sean Siperstein

Date: 11/4/11

Source: <http://www.citizenvox.org/2011/11/04/the-limits-of-free-speech-citizens-united-vs->

1. Describe what's going on in the political cartoon (Who? What? When? Where?).
2. Identify any symbols (ex: an elephant to represent the Republican Party) portrayed in the cartoon and analyze what they represent.
3. What is the artist's message in the cartoon? What do you think?
4. Explain what this cartoon tells us about special interest money in political campaigns after the *Citizens United* decision.

Political Cartoon #4



Title: Able to Change the Course of Democratic Elections with a Single Check

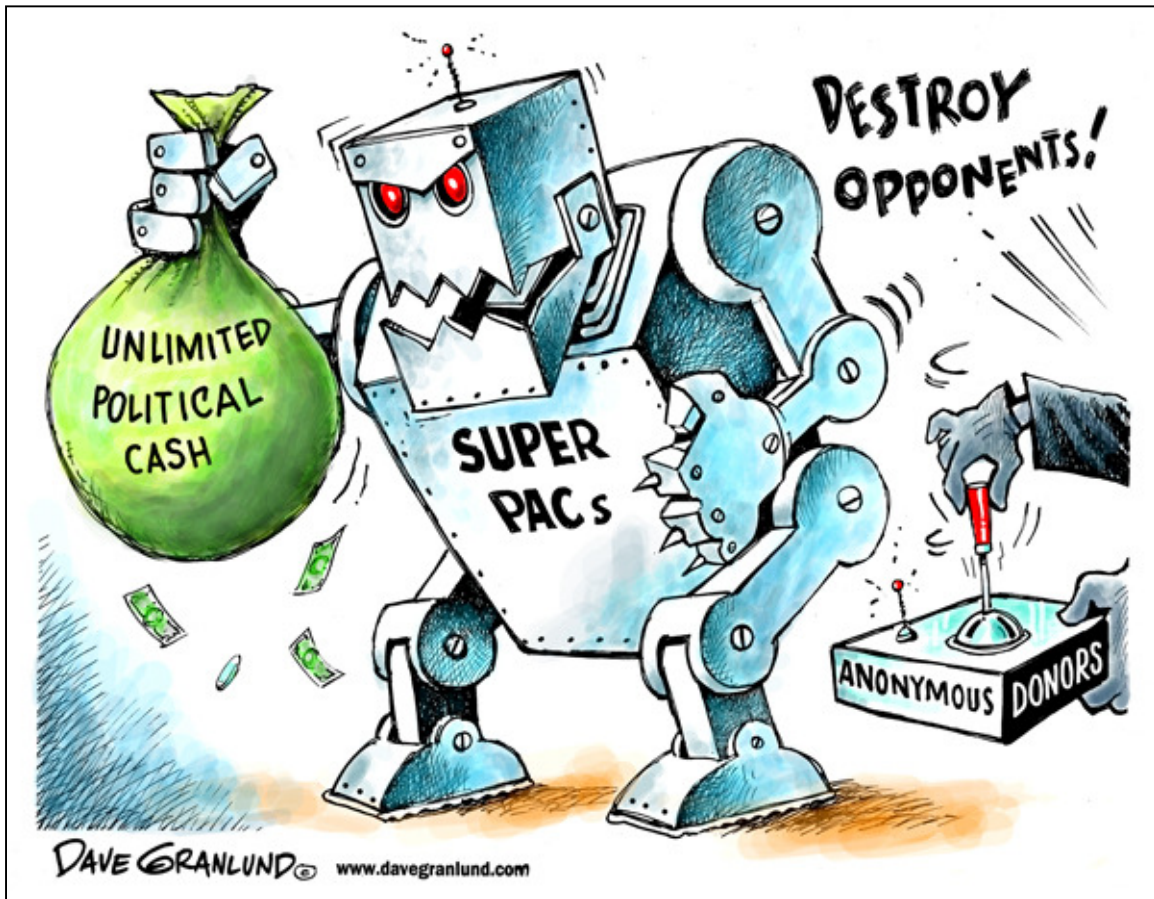
Artist: RJ Matson, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

Date: 1/18/12

Source: <http://thecomixnews.com/edtoons/2012/0118/pacs/01.php>

1. Describe what's going on in the political cartoon (Who? What? When? Where?).
2. Identify any symbols (ex: an elephant to represent the Republican Party) portrayed in the cartoon and analyze what they represent.
3. What is the artist's message in the cartoon? What do you think?
4. Explain what this cartoon tells us about special interest money in political campaigns after the Citizens United decision.

Political Cartoon #5



Title: Super PACs the New Political Machine

Artist: Dave Granlund

Date: 9/12/12

Source: <http://unitedrepublic.org/august-goes-obama-autumn-goes-pacs/>

1. Describe what's going on in the political cartoon (Who? What? When? Where?).
2. Identify any symbols (ex: an elephant to represent the Republican Party) portrayed in the cartoon and analyze what they represent.
3. What is the artist's message in the cartoon? What do you think?
4. Explain what this cartoon tells us about special interest money in political campaigns after the Citizens United decision.