AP Government Chapter 11

Interest Groups
The worst and oldest stereotype of a lobbyist is someone who bribes a law maker to get a favorable policy decision. Our nation’s capital has become a hub of interest group activity. Interest groups have offices in Washington, D.C.

What Interest Groups do?
Testify for and against legislation
Lawyers argue for strict government enforcement of environmental regulation
Lobbyist entertain congress members at lunch
Bureaucrats work out rules and regulations with representatives of interest groups

The Role of Interest Groups
Participation in interest Groups has mushroomed. The right to organize groups is protected by the constitution (1st Amendment).

The definition
Interest refers to policy goal. Group is a combination of people. Therefore, an interest group is a group of people who work to secure the passage of policies that benefit them. Parties fight their battles through the electoral process; they run candidates for public office. Interest groups may support candidates for office but they do not run their own slate of candidates. Interest groups are policy specialist whereas, parties are policy generalist. Interest groups do not try to appeal to everyone. They only serve the group with their interest.

Theories of Interest Groups – 3 important theories
Pluralist Theory: Interest group activity brings representation to all. Groups compete and counter balance one another in the political market place. Influence is dispersed among many centers of power. No group win or loses wall the time. Groups provide a key link, make competing claims on the government, maintain balance in the government, play by the rules and are able to affect policy with either money or numbers. Some groups are more powerful than others but all have the ear of congress through lobbying.

Elite Theory – a few groups (primarily the wealthy) have most power. Key groups and institutions look out for themselves. Elitist point out that the same individuals hold positions on several corporate boards, foundation boards, university trustee ships, they call these interlocking and concentrated power centers. Elitist point out that the different groups do not have equal power, awesome power is held by the largest corporations, the same people serve as leaders in different groups and corporate elites prevail when it comes to big decisions.

Hyper pluralist Theory – too many groups get too much of what they want resulting in contradictory policy that is lacking direction. Excessive deference is given to groups in an effort to please and appease every interest, agencies proliferate, conflicting regulations expand, programs multiply and the budget skyrocket. Interest group liberalism states that all pressure group demands are legitimate and the government’s job is to address them all.

Sub governments – Iron Triangles consist of Interest group leaders interested in policy X, the government agency in charge of administering policy X and the members of congressional committees and subcommittees handling policy X promote interest group pluralism.
All the elements composing sub governments have the same goal: protecting their self interest (see page 328 for key points)

**What makes interest groups successful?**

**Size, Intensity and Financial Resources**

**Size**
Smaller groups are more likely to achieve their goals than larger groups. They have an organizational advantage over larger groups.
Potential groups are ever one who could join a group. Actual groups are everyone who does join the group.
Collective good is something of value that cannot be withheld from a potential group member. Members of the potential group share in benefits that members of the actual group work to secure. This is called the free rider problem. The bigger the group, the more serious the free rider problem.

**Olson’s Law of Large Groups**
In small groups the benefit of success is greater than in large groups where the benefit is smaller. The larger the group, the less likely potential members will contribute. The primary way to overcome Olson’s law is to provide attractive benefits for only those who join the organization; selective benefits

**Intensity**
Intensity is a psychological advantage. When a group shows that it cares deeply about an issue, politicians are more likely to listen.
Single Issue Groups have a dramatic political development in recent years. A single issue groups has a narrow interest, dislikes compromise and single mindedly pursues a goal. Abortion, Anti-Vietnam War, Gun Control are examples of single issue groups.

**Financial Resources**
Money talks in the American Political System. Interest groups spend millions of dollars a year on lobbying and campaign contributions but moneyed interest cannot always buy their way to success in congress.

**Interest Group Explosion**
Encyclopedia of Associations reports that 80% of the groups originated from occupational, industrial, or professional memberships and were established after WWII. Over 90% are headquartered in Washington, D.C. Technology makes interest group politics easy (WATS)

**How Groups Try to Shape Policy**
Strategies to achieve policy goals (4 ways)

1) **Lobbying** – a communication by someone other than a citizen acting on his/her own behalf directed to a governmental decision maker with the hope of influencing his/her decision. (political persuaders who represent organized groups) Two Types: regular paid employees of a corporation, union or association or those available for hire on a temporary basis.

Lobbyist can help members of Congress

Lobbyists are an important source of information. They help with strategy for getting information through, formulate campaign strategies to get the incumbent reelected and they are a source of ideas and innovations. Lobbyists are most effective as information sources. Lobbying is directed primarily toward activating and reinforcing supporters.
2) Electioneering – because lobbying works best with those already on the same side, getting the right people into office and keeping them there is also a key strategy. Interest groups aid candidates financially and get their group members out to support their candidates.

Political Action Committees (PACs) have exploded from 608 in 1974 to 3,868 in 2004. As campaign costs have risen PACs have come along to help pay the bill. Nearly ½ of the candidates running for reelection have received the majority of their funds from PACs. PAC contributions are investments for the future and incumbents are most likely to return the investment. Why do PACs give money to certain candidates? (Page 339) Candidates who belong to certain committees, or support certain issues or are from the state where the PACs interest originate, those who can help with executive or regulatory agencies and those who hold influential leadership positions are the candidates who get the money.

3) Litigation – If interest groups fail in congress they go to the court. These suits may not halt troublesome practices but the constant threat of a lawsuit increases the likelihood that business will consider their impact. The most famous interest group victories were with Civil Rights Groups (1950s). While Civil Rights Bills remained stalled in Congress there were major court victories concerning school desegregation, equal housing and labor market equality. Amicus Curiae – friend of the court brief. Numerous groups file a collective position on a particular issue and how they will be affected by the outcome of the case. Class Action Suit – a group of people in a similar situation combines their common grievances into a single suit. The class action is the greatest most effective legal engine to remedy mass wrongs.

4) Going Public – Interest groups carefully cultivate their public image. Even the wealthiest appeal to the public opinion. Many groups try to create a reservoir of goodwill with the public.

Types of Interest Groups (4 clusters)
Economic issues – all interests are ultimately concerned with wages, prices and profits. Commonly public policy in America has economic effects through regulations, tax advantages, subsidies and contracts and international trade policy. Business, labor and farmers all fret over the impact of government regulations. A slight change can cost a great deal or bring increased profits.

Labor – has more affiliated members than any other interest group. American unions press for policies to ensure better working conditions and higher wages.

Union Shop – requires workers to join union.

Right to Work laws – outlaw union membership as a condition for employment. Taft-Hartley Act – permitted states to adopt right to work laws. 1956 American labor movement reaches its peak. 33% of non agricultural workforce belongs to a union since then the percentage has declined to 16%. Low wages in other countries have diminished the American job market in a number of key manufacturing areas. (Steel, Auto makers) Employers make non union jobs satisfying.

Business
Big banks, Insurance Companies, and Multinational Corporations
70% of interest groups in Washington, D.C. represent Big Business. What helps one business may hurt another.

**Environmental Interest**
New interest group. First Earth Day April 22, 1970. Ecology minded people march on Washington, D.C. to symbolize their support for environmental protection. Environmental groups have promoted pollution control policies, wilderness protection and population control. They opposed strip mining, supersonic aircraft, Alaskan Oil pipeline, offshore drilling and nuclear power plants. The concerns of environmentalist often directly conflict with energy goals.

**Equality Interests**
- **Minorities and women:** African Americans want equality at the Polls, in housing on the job and in education. Although the NAACP has won many cases in principal, wins in practice have been slow. Today the NAACP’s main vehicle is the Fair Share Program which negotiates agreements with national and regional business to increase minority hiring and use of minorities as contractors. The 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote in federal elections but women continue to demand equality. NOW – the National Organization of Women lobby to end discrimination.
- **ERA (Equal Right Amendment):** The proposed 27th amendment to the constitution which never passed. It was stopped by an appeal that passage would destroy the integrity of the family, require communal bathrooms, lead to women in combat and eliminate legal protections that women already had.

**Consumers and Public Interest**
Public interest lobbies are organizations that seek a collective good. Ralph Nader led the consumer safety attack on General Motors. As a result of his efforts, Congress authorized the Consumer Public Safety Commission. There are also interest groups that speak for children and the mentally ill. Good government groups such as the Common Cause push for openness and fairness and religious groups work to maintain a moral standard of living within the American society.

**Understanding Interest Groups**
A free society must allow for the representation of all groups that seek to influence political decision making.

**Interest Groups and Democracy**
James Madison posed to create a wide open system in which many groups could participate and counterbalance each other.

**Interest Groups and the Scope of Government**
President Reagan and Carter stated that interest groups were negative obstacles that they faced in completing their presidential goals. The more areas in which the federal government is involved, the more interest groups develop.