Chapter 11, Section 3

For use with textbook pages 270–275

Interest Groups

KEY TERMS

**public interest group** a group that supports causes that affect the lives of Americans in general (page 271)

**public policy** the course of action the government takes in response to an issue or problem (page 272)

**political action committee (PAC)** a group that collects money from its members and uses it to support some candidates and oppose others (page 272)

**lobbyist** a representative of an interest group who contacts lawmakers or other government officials directly to influence their policymaking (page 272)

**DRAWING FROM EXPERIENCE**

What advertisements for products do you see in magazines and on television? How do the ads try to influence people to buy them? Which ones influence you to buy a particular product?

The last section discussed ways that mass media influences politics. This section describes the way that interest groups influence government.

**ORGANIZING YOUR THOUGHTS**

Use the diagram below to help you take notes. There are several types of interest groups. List four types and an example of each in the diagram.
Chapter 11, Section 3 (continued)

**READ TO LEARN**

- **Types of Interest Groups** *(page 270)*

  Citizens join interest groups to increase their chances of influencing decision makers. People can belong to several different interest groups at one time. The First Amendment protects people’s rights to belong to interest groups.

  Some of the largest interest groups in the United States deal with economic interests. One of the largest of these groups is the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Other groups represent specific types of businesses. These groups try to influence government decisions on issues such as taxes or safety regulations related to their industry. Interest groups such as labor unions work to promote the interest of workers. People such as doctors and lawyers have their own interest groups.

  Some interest groups promote a particular ethnic group, age group, or gender. For example, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) promotes the interests of older Americans, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) works to improve the lives of African Americans.

  Some interest groups work for special causes. The National Wildlife Federation and the Sierra Club both work to protect nature and wildlife. All the interest groups described so far are considered private groups because they promote only the special interests of their own members.

  Some interest groups work for causes that affect the lives of Americans in general. These are called **public interest groups**. For example, Common Cause is a public interest group. It works for such things as getting laws passed to control pollution and to protect consumers.

  **9.** What do some of the largest interest groups in the United States deal with?
Influencing Government (page 272)

The main goal of interest groups is to influence public policy. This is the course of action the government takes in response to an issue or problem. Interest groups influence government in several ways.

Some interest groups use the elections to support candidates who support their views. Some interest groups have formed political action committees (PACs). PACs collect money from their members and use it to support some candidates and to oppose others.

Interest groups influence policy by taking cases to court. For example, when a group thinks that a law is not being properly enforced, the group may sue the party who is breaking the law.

Interest groups use lobbyists to help influence government officials. Lobbyists contact lawmakers or other government officials to influence their policymaking. Lobbyists work at all levels of government. Some are volunteers and some are paid employees. Lobbyists have several ways of influencing lawmakers. They know how the government works. They know which department to contact about a particular issue. They know how to make friends and talk persuasively. Effective lobbyists supply lawmakers with up-to-date information about public issues, especially information that helps them with their own cases. Some lobbyists suggest solutions to problems and even prepare drafts of bills for lawmakers to consider. Once a law is passed, lobbyists work to make sure that government officials carry it out.

10. What is the main goal of interest groups?
Techniques of Interest Groups (page 273)

Interest groups use various techniques to influence public opinion. They do this to get more members and to convince people of their cause. Interest groups use direct mail to recruit members. They advertise on television and newspapers. They stage protests and put together public events to get coverage in the media.

Interest groups use propaganda techniques to communicate their ideas. To avoid being misled, people should recognize some propaganda techniques. Endorsements use a popular person to support a candidate or issue. The idea is that if this person supports the issue, then others should, too. Card stacking is a technique that presents only one side of an issue. Getting on the bandwagon means convincing people that everyone agrees with the interest group’s point of view. A glittering generality is a statement that sounds good but is meaningless. Interest groups use and misuse symbols to appeal to people. Just-plain folks is a technique that shows photographs of candidates for office wearing hard hats or eating pizza to make them look like everyday people. Name-calling turns people against a candidate or an idea by using unpleasant descriptions for the person or idea.

11. What technique is an interest group using when it shows an athlete at a campaign event for a candidate?

Regulation of Interest Groups (page 275)

State and federal governments pass laws that regulate the activities of interest groups. The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 limits the amounts of money PACs may give to candidates for national office. The
Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act requires lobbyists to register with the Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Secretary of the Senate. Lobbyists are supposed to say who hired them and how much they are paid. However, only people whose main job is lobbying have to register. These people make up only a small part of all lobbyists. In addition, the law is difficult to enforce.

Federal and state laws require former government employees to wait a certain period of time before becoming lobbyists. This requirement attempts to prevent public officials from taking unfair advantage of their inside knowledge on behalf of interest groups. These laws have also proved difficult to enforce.

Critics of interest groups argue that interest groups have too much say in government. Critics also say that interest groups have too much influence over officeholders. Those who support interest groups say that individuals alone have little effect on government. However, as members of an interest group, people can increase their influence.

12. What argument do supporters of interest groups give?