

Business Doesn't Always Get Its Way

Summary

Americans think of lobbying groups as supporting interests they oppose. However, pluralists assert that lobbyists don't just work on the behalf of the rich and powerful and the rich and powerful don't always get their way. The origin of the word lobbyist comes from people that would wait in the lobby in the Capitol to grab the attention of a congress member to advocate a policy. Although business interests often get their way they can be countered by citizen groups, unfavorable publicity and the status quo. The article reports that when citizen groups and business groups organize they each win at about equal rates. However, when groups faced no opposition business groups became more likely to win, but the same did not occur for citizen groups, and for other reasons businesses are well positioned to win more.

The article says that business influence is more complicated than what is generally recognized. After researching Lobbying Activity on 98 policy issues over the course of 4 years, they determined that Business and Citizen groups succeeded equally in a fair fight.

During the Clinton administration citizen groups were more successful than business groups, and equally successful during the George W.bush election. Some examples of business backed issues

during the George W. Bush administration were changes to policies made in order to relax EPA rules on mine waste disposal, repeal the estate tax, overturn ergonomic standards designed to reduce injuries, and create a repository for nuclear fuel. While examples of Citizen backed issues during the same administration were setting limits on chlorine byproducts in drinking water, allowing manufacturers to produce generic versions of AIDS drugs for sale in Africa, and requiring mortgage lenders to provide greater disclosure of the costs associated with their services, however issues backed by citizen groups received much less media attention, and thus it gives the impression that businesses group have more influence.

Later in the article they state that while business had a clear advantage when they received no opposition, citizen groups were often ignored by policy makers when they received no opposition. One reason this might be the case is because business issues that received no opposition were more likely to have an easy solution that did not challenge the status quo, while citizen supported issues did not have the same advantages, also businesses generally have greater resources to pursue their goals over a variety of issues, while citizen groups generally needed to give priority to one particular issue.

So while business groups don't win every battle they are well positioned to win the war on policy lobbying. However, the advantage of businesses is far from absolute.