**INTEREST GROUPS**

**Part A**: As you read this page, highlight all the ways that you can find in which individuals, interest groups, and media can influence government.

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| To **MONITOR** the government means to closely observe what officials, agencies, or branches are doing. For example, following a bill that is passing through Congress. | To **INFLUENCE** the government means to persuade members of the government to adopt policies or programs you prefer. |

Political parties are not the only groups that can influence government policies. **Individuals**, the **media** and special **interest groups** can monitor and be influential to government in many ways.

**KEY TERMS**:

**Public Policy**: The actions that the government takes about a problem.

**Public Opinion**: The collection of opinions or attitudes of the people.

**Interest Group**: A group of individuals with common interests that seeks to influence public policy.

**Lobbyists**: People who represent interest groups and communicate with lawmakers.

**INDIVIDUALS**

Any **individuals** can impact the government. Often, individuals attempt to influence the government by running for public office. People do not have to run for office to influence the government. By simply carrying out one of their most important civic responsibilities, voting, individuals play a major role in changing the government. Whether it is voting a candidate into office or out of office, or voting in favor of or against an amendment to the Florida Constitution, citizens change the government during every election. Petitioning the government, collecting signatures on issues, speaking at meeting, sending letters or e-mail messages, making campaign contributions, and using social media are additional ways that individuals can influence the government.

**INTEREST GROUPS**

An **interest group** is a group of individuals with common interests that seek to influence public policy. There are thousands of interest groups for all types of interests such as the environment, gun ownership, and medicine. **Interest Groups** use their First Amendment rights of peaceable assembly, free speech, and petition to monitor and influence the government. They attempt to influence people by working together for their goal. **Political Action Committees (PAC)** are often connected to interest groups. They raise money and contribute to campaigns of candidates that they support. When interest groups work with members of **Congress** or with other elected legislators to get laws passed, it is referred to as **lobbying.** Groups may hire **lobbyists,** who meet with lawmakers to try to get support for a bill that would benefit the issue the **PAC** supports. An interest group can also educate its members on issues it wants the group members to support. For example, interest groups ask their members to vote and give money to candidates that the interest group supports.

**THE MEDIA**

**Media** refers to methods of communicating to large numbers of people. The media includes newspapers, magazines, radio, television programs, internet websites, blogs, and social media. The media act as a **watchdog** to investigate and report on the government. They question government officials and research government activities to identify issues and to expose possible wrongdoing by government officials.

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**Part B**: After completing the reading, use what you have read and highlighted to help you to answer the questions below.

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| **QUESTION** | **ANSWER** |
| 1) What does it mean to **monitor** government? |  |
| 2) What does it mean to **influence** government? |  |
| 3) What are four ways that individuals can influence the government? |  |
| 4) What is an interest group? |  |
| 5) How do interest groups try to influence government? |  |
| 6) What are three ways that the media can monitor, or watch over, government? |  |
| 7) Of the answers you’ve provided, what do YOU think is the best way to influence the government, and why? |  |

8) Pretend that an interest group called the Council for Healthy School Lunches wants to make your lunch in the school cafeteria more healthy for students by adding fruits and vegetables and limiting the amount of fried foods. What are actions that they might take to influence the government to support their position?

A) Hire a lobbyist to meet with lawmakers to convince them to pass a law about healthy school lunches.

B) Create advertisements to educate the public about the importance of nutrition in school lunches.

C) Ask members of their interest group to vote in elections for candidates who have made funding school lunches a priority.

D) All of the above.

ANSWER: