

LESSON PLAN – How Does Campaign Financing Work?

Subject: How Does Campaign Finance Work?

Grade Level: 6-8

Standards:

C.6.11 Describe the primary and general election process for local, state, and national offices, including those used to select congressional and presidential office holders.

C.6.12 Identify and explain the duties of and selection process for local and state government officials who make, implement, and enforce laws.

C.6.16 Explain the role citizens have in making decisions and rules within the community, state, and nation.

C.6.17 Use information from a variety of resources to demonstrate an understanding of local, state, regional leaders, as well as civic issues.

C.6.19 Examine ways by which citizens may effectively voice opinions, monitor government, and bring about change in government including voting and participation in the election process. C.6.20 Use a variety of informational resources to identify and evaluate contemporary issues that involve civic responsibility, individual rights, and the common good.

C.6.23 Explain ways that citizens can participate in the election process (political parties, campaigns, and elections) at the national, state, and local levels.

Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

Computer, laptop, or tablet OR paper, pen, or pencil.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe the difference between Hard money and Soft money.
- Students will be able to explain the purpose of the Federal Election Commission.
- Students will be able to discuss how donations to candidates differ from donations to PACs.
- Students will be able to explain how PACs can spend donated money.

Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

What does it cost to run for a political office?

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Think about what is involved. TV ads, transportation, hotels, meals, cars and gasoline, airplane tickets, offices, staff. These are just a few of the things that money will be needed for. Where does the money come from? Can only the wealthy run for office?

During the 2020 election, BILLIONS of dollars were spent on campaigning.

Body of Lesson:

How Does Campaign Finance Work?

Watch the Video

<https://video.wfyi.org/video/how-does-campaign-finance-work-za2fji/>

Contributing money to a candidate or a political cause is part of the rights in the first amendment to the Constitution.

Donations can be made in TWO forms: Hard money and Soft money.

Hard money

Money donated directly to a specific candidate

There are limits on how much can be donated in this way,

Soft money

Money donated to a political party or a political action committee (PAC).

There are NO limits to the amount that can be donated this way.

The party or PAC can use the money in any way they want.

Over more than a century, Congress has tried to pass laws that limit the amounts of money that can be donated. This has created a lot of discussion and disagreement. A legal case went to the Supreme Court in 2010. The Court ruled that limiting the speech or media use by a group was a violation of free speech.

Since that time, almost 3 billion dollars have been donated to Super PACS (large PACs). Most of this money has been donated by wealthy people.

This money is known as “dark money” as the donors to the PACs are not known to the public. The large donations can have a large impact on campaigns.

Discussion Questions for the class: (this can be done as a large group, in small groups, or students can submit written answers)

1. Should donations to PACs be limited? Why or Why Not?
2. Should PACs be required to disclose the name of donors and the amount donated?
3. Should restrictions be imposed on how the PACs can use donated money?
4. Would you ever consider donating to a candidate or a PAC? Why or why not?

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The Federal Election Commission (FEC)

<https://www.fec.gov/>

The FEC is an independent regulatory agency of the government. It was created to enforce federal laws related to campaign financing for the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, Presidency, and Vice Presidency.

Anyone who wants to run for federal office must register and complete financial reports if they raise or spend more than \$5,000 on the campaign.

All federal candidates have to appoint a principal campaign committee. This committee is responsible for collecting the contributions and paying the expenses of the campaign.

Class Activity:

Student discussions or written assignments on the following questions:

1. Are the current campaign finance regulations adequate?
2. Are there additional regulations you would like to see put in place?
3. What impact do you think the large contributions to the PACs have on political campaigns and election outcomes?

Summary/Closure

As early as 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt saw the need to pass laws to regulate campaign finance. Over the years, several laws have been passed. There is still much disagreement as to what restrictions should or should not be placed on donations.

Think about how you as an individual can impact future regulations.

Extension Activities

Indiana Campaign Finance Regulations

<https://www.in.gov/sos/elections/campaign-finance/>

Review the rules related to Indiana Campaign Finance. Compare Indiana regulations with Federal or other state regulations.

Michigan Campaign Finance

<https://www.michigan.gov/sos/elections/disclosure/cfr>

Ohio Campaign Finance

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<https://www.ohiosos.gov/campaign-finance/>

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