

HMH ELECTION CONNECTION 2016

The Rise in Campaign Spending

Introduction

Election campaigns cost a lot of money. Running for mayor, city council, state or national legislatures, or governor can be very expensive. For example, projections of total spending in the 2008 presidential election, including the primary races, were close to \$1 billion.

Candidates and their campaign staffs carefully decide where the campaign will get money and how the money will be spent.

Many controversies and issues surround campaign funding. One of these is how to regulate campaign spending to make sure that the funds candidates raise during their campaigns are used for their intended purpose.

Task

In this Webquest you will work with a team to investigate the rise in campaign spending on national, state, and local elections. You will then use your findings to take a group position on the issue of campaign financing and you will support your position with facts and opinions. Then, using your position, you and your teammates will stage a debate addressing the effect of money on the positions candidates take in their campaigns.

Process & Resources

Step 1

Form a small group with three or four other students. Your group will form a debate team.

Step 2

As a debate team, divide up the Internet links provided below to find information about some aspect of campaign financing. Take notes as you read about whether the current system of campaign spending is basically fair and sensible or whether there is a need for campaign financing reform. Use the Internet links to learn more about individual campaign donations to a candidate or a candidate's party, contributions by Political Action Committees (PACs) and political parties, and public funding provided by the government for political campaigns.

“Follow Political Money”

<http://www.opensecrets.org>

Running for political office takes big money. Who's paying? Examine this site to look up your representatives.

“Loophole Lets Candidates Skirt Donation Limit”

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/22/AR2007072201095.html>

Investigate this site to see how a loophole in political fundraising laws allows candidates to simultaneously co donations for their presidential bids and for other political groups connected to them.

HMH ELECTION CONNECTION 2016

“Stricter Limits on Political Campaign Funds”

http://www.ontheissues.org/VoteMatch/q18_2006.asp

Explore this site for a clear statement of a number of different positions on campaign financing.

“The Federal Election Commission and the Federal Campaign Finance Law”

<http://www.fec.gov/pages/brochures/fecfeca.shtml>

Explore this site for detailed explanations of various aspects of campaign finance law.

“Campaign Finance Links: National Disclosure and Research Resources”

<http://www.opensecrets.org/news/disclosure.php>

Explore the many links to sites dealing with campaign finance data on local, state, and federal elections.

“Political Action Committees”

<http://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/index.asp>

Visit this site to see lists of campaign contributions by PACs (“who got the money”) and donations to PACS (“who gave the money”).

Step 3

Meet with your team and stake out a position with supporting facts and arguments. Review your research and decide whether you think the current system of campaign spending is fair or whether it needs to be reformed. List facts and arguments that support your opinion. Make a note card for each argument. Organize your note cards so the arguments are in a logical order. Then write an outline of a speech stating your position and your supporting arguments.

Step 4

Hold a class debate with a team that has taken a different position.

Conclusion

As you have seen from the research for your debate, the rise in campaign spending has produced an array of issues and proposed changes. The subject of campaign financing touches on many issues that are central to the overall debate surrounding the democratic process in the United States—issues of fairness, special interests, corruption, and public policy. By completing this Webquest, you will be able to have an informed opinion on a topic that will remain important to you as a voter throughout your lifetime.

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2016

Evaluation

The rubric, or chart, below is how you and your group will be evaluated on your debate. Ask your teacher to explain anything on the rubric that is not clear.

	5	4	3	2	1	Points
Research	Research is exceptionally thorough, resulting in a variety of data and facts.	Research is thorough, producing much useful information.	Research is adequate, producing some useful information.	Research is barely adequate, producing little useful information.	Research is inadequate, producing no useful information.	
Note Taking	Note taking on Web sites is exceptionally thorough, providing a rich supply of data to draw upon.	Note taking on Web sites is thorough, providing much data to draw upon.	Note taking on Web sites is adequate, providing data to draw upon.	Note taking on Web sites is barely adequate, providing inadequate data to draw upon.	Note taking on Web sites is inadequate, providing too little data to draw upon.	
Positions	Positions are exceptionally well thought out.	Positions are well thought out.	Positions are adequately thought out.	Positions are barely thought out.	Positions are not well thought out.	
Arguments and Facts Supporting Positions	Positions are very well supported by facts and arguments.	Positions are well supported by facts and arguments.	Positions are supported by facts and arguments.	Positions are barely supported by facts and arguments.	Positions are not supported by facts and arguments.	
						Score



Teacher Notes

Synopsis

In the Webquest *The Rise in Campaign Spending*, each team will prepare a position to present in a debate. Each position will include arguments that support that position.

Objectives

Students who do exemplary work on this WebQuest will learn about

- how political campaigns are financed today
- problems with the current system of campaign spending
- possible solutions to problems in the current system
- systems in other countries