



# Bidding for Office: Who Should Pay for Elections?

Vol. 2 No. 2

## NEWSMatters

BIDDING FOR OFFICE: WHO SHOULD PAY FOR ELECTIONS? is one in a series of six NewsMatters programs for the 1998-99 school year. Each 15-20 minute video in the NewsMatters series examines an issue or topic in the news. The video is supported by a poster pertaining to the topic, a teacher's guide, and regularly updated information on our Web site ([www.ku.com](http://www.ku.com)). The NewsMatters program is designed to promote discussion and critical thinking in the classroom.

NewsMatters videos will rarely if ever provide clear-cut conclusions about an issue. Rather, each video's goal is to leave more questions in viewers' minds than answers. The supplementary materials are designed to help focus and direct these questions and to generate thought and debate about the topic. These materials are flexible. You can control the pace and length of each lesson, and you can use any, all, or none of these materials.

NewsMatters Teacher's Guide  
for

## Bidding for Office: Who Should Pay for Elections?

BIDDING FOR OFFICE: WHO SHOULD PAY FOR ELECTIONS? examines the issue of campaign finance. The video defines the terms of the campaign finance debate, takes a look at the sources of campaign money, and discusses proposed campaign finance reform measures. This activity guide further encourages students to consider and research the issue. Ten of the following activities are designed to be reproduced. Your students can organize and complete these exercises on their own. The other activities are designed for classroom participation and teacher presentation.

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## Readiness Activity

*(An activity to be done before viewing the video)*

This activity will help your students become familiar with some of the important terms and themes in BIDDING FOR OFFICE: WHO SHOULD PAY FOR ELECTIONS? before they watch the video. Divide the class into five groups. Assign each group three of the terms listed below. One member of each group should record an agreed-upon definition or description for each term and then present these definitions to the entire class for discussion.

campaign  
campaign finance  
candidate  
corporate  
donor

Federal Election Commission,  
or FEC  
Russell Feingold  
First Amendment  
"hard money"  
issue ad

John McCain  
political action committee,  
or PAC  
political party  
Richard Nixon  
"soft money"

## Discussion Questions

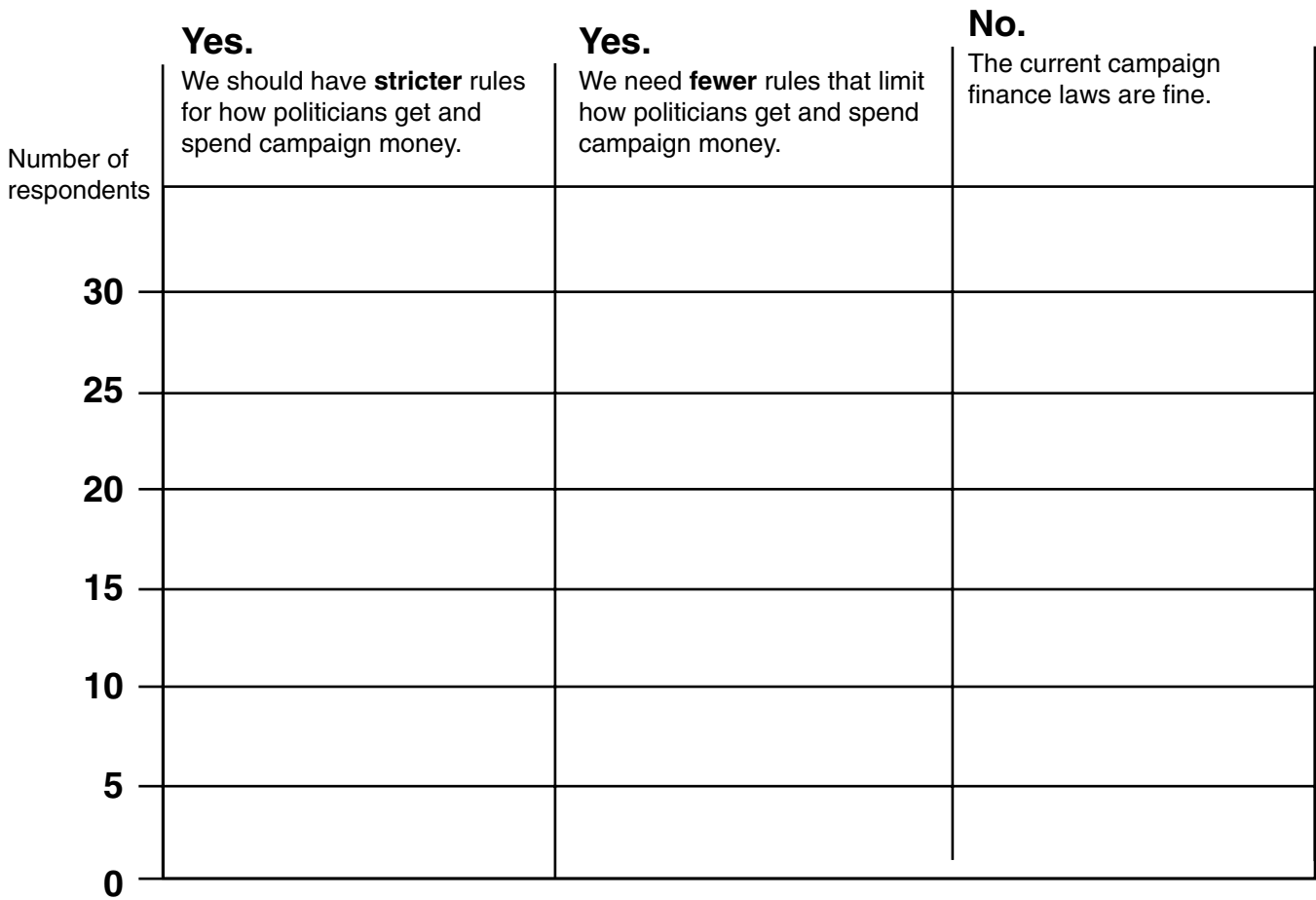
These questions will help you and your class review important points made in the video. The questions will also give some structure to your discussions about **BIDDING FOR OFFICE: WHO SHOULD PAY FOR ELECTIONS?** After your students view the video, ask them to comment on these questions. Some questions have specific answers and others are more open-ended. You may wish to use these questions as a springboard for further discussion.

- In terms of campaign finance, what is the difference between “hard money” and “soft money”?
  
- What are PACs? How do they contribute to political campaigns?
  
- What are some of the main sources of the money that pays for political campaigns?
  
- Why do you think politicians are willing to spend so much money to get elected? Do you think the high cost of political campaigns is a good or bad thing? Why?
  
- How do you feel about campaign contributions by businesses and political action committees? Do you think this money influences elections or lawmakers’ decisions? Explain.
  
- What are some of the current campaign finance laws? What do you think the reasoning behind these laws is? Do the restrictions seem fair to you? Why or why not? Do you think politicians follow these rules? If not, how do they break the rules?
  
- What are some of the things reformers want to change in the system by which politicians raise and spend campaign money?
  
- Do you feel measures that place limits on campaign spending may violate the First Amendment? Explain. How do you think lawmakers could reform campaign spending and still protect free speech?
  
- Do you think campaign donations affect the issues that Congress considers? Explain why or why not.
  
- Overall, do you think too much money is spent on election campaigns? Why or why not?

**Campaign Finance — A Poll** *reproducible activity*

Polls show people’s opinions and ideas about different subjects. You can take your own poll to find out what people think about campaign fundraising and campaign spending. Ask at least 30 friends and family members what they think of campaign finance reform. Do we need to make campaign finance laws more strict or less strict? Do we need to change these laws at all? If the people you talk to think we should change the rules for campaign money, write down their ideas for changing the laws. Make a bar graph of your poll responses using the chart below.

**Do We Need Campaign Finance Reform?**



Poll respondents’ suggestions for campaign finance reform:

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**ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY:**

- Compare your poll responses with those of your classmates. Together, come up with a class list of ideas for campaign finance reform. Mail this list to your senator or representative in Congress.

**The First Amendment** *reproducible activity*

Many opponents of measures that limit campaign spending use the First Amendment to the Constitution to support their views. Read the amendment for yourself and see what you think it means for campaign finance reform. Then answer the questions below.

**Amendment I:**

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”*

■ What are the five freedoms protected by the First Amendment?

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■ Do you think the freedom to spend money for political campaigns is part of the freedoms listed in the First Amendment? Do you agree or disagree that campaign spending is protected by the First Amendment? Explain your answers.

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■ How might people who oppose campaign spending limits use the First Amendment to support their view?

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■ Some legislators have proposed a constitutional amendment that would specifically allow limits on campaign spending. Would you support or oppose such an amendment? Why?

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**Campaign Finance Reform Bills** *reproducible activity*

Each of the three pairs of legislators listed below has sponsored a campaign finance reform bill in Congress. All these lawmakers want to reduce campaign spending and corporate influence in politics. However, their plans use different methods to achieve this goal.

Use newspapers, news magazines, and the Internet to find out more about the legislation each of these teams proposed. Then, in the space provided, list the main components of each team's bill.

■ John McCain and Russell Feingold

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■ Ernest F. Hollings and Arlen Specter

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■ Christopher Shays and Marty Meehan

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**GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTION:**

- Which, if any, of these bills would you support? Explain your answer.

**Campaigning on Television** *reproducible activity*

Political campaigns go into high gear just before elections. Television campaign ads are no exception to this rule. For two weeks before the next election in your area, keep a log of all the campaign ads you see on TV for a particular political race, such as the race for governor or president. Keep a tally of the total number of ads you see, and make a note of which candidates are promoted the most. In addition, keep track of the issues the ads discuss. You can record your information in the chart below. Then, after the election is over, answer the questions that appear beneath the chart.

	Candidate:	Candidate:	Candidate:	Candidate:
<b>Number of ads</b>				
<b>Issues mentioned in ads</b>				

- What were the main issues the campaign ads focused on? Did different candidates' ads focus on different issues, or were one or two issues at the center of all the candidates' ads?

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- Were any of the TV campaign ads you saw "negative" ads — that is, did candidates use their TV ads to directly criticize the public policies or private actions of their opponents? In general, do you think negative campaign ads help candidates win elections? Explain.

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- Which candidate had the most campaign ads? Which candidate won the election? What conclusion do you draw from this?

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- Do you think television ads influenced the outcome of the election you tracked? Why or why not?

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**Campaign Spending Budgets *reproducible activity***

Political campaign spending has certainly changed over the years. When Abraham Lincoln ran for the House of Representatives in 1846, the Whig Party gave him \$200 for his campaign. Mr. Lincoln returned \$199.25 of the money, saying, "I did not need the money. I made the canvass on my own horse, my entertainment being at the houses of friends cost me nothing; and my only outlay was 75 cents for a barrel of cider, which some farmhands insisted I should treat them to." As you've learned, today's campaigns for Congress can cost millions of dollars. At your library or on the Internet, do some research into all the different things that make up a political campaign. Then try to think of some ways politicians could cut their campaign spending. The terms below list some of the different things politicians spend campaign money on. In the space provided, tell whether you think today's candidates spend too much, too little, or just enough of their campaign money on each item. Explain your answers.

**Television ads** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Radio ads** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Newspaper ads** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Fundraising events** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Staff salaries** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Rent and other expenses for campaign work space** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Travel expenses** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Buttons, bumper stickers, and other promotional items** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Polls and other campaign research** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- Do you think today's politicians spend too much on certain parts of their campaigns? Explain your answer.
- In your opinion, what would be a reasonable spending limit for congressional candidates? What would candidates have to do to operate their campaigns within the limit you suggest?







**Corporate Campaign Donors** *reproducible activity*

The industries and groups listed below are all large contributors to political campaigns and political party soft money funds. Sometimes businesses give money to political parties or PACs because they hope they can help candidates who would support their business goals in Congress. For example, a company might give soft money to a political party whose members want to reduce the taxes companies have to pay. Or, a labor union might give money to a political party that says it wants more laws to protect the rights of union workers. Using newspapers, newsmagazines, your library, and the Internet, research the involvement of one of the industries or groups listed below in political campaigns. Then write a few paragraphs that tell how much this group or industry gives in political donations. Also explain what kind of actions by lawmakers might affect the group or industry you chose.

**insurance companies****real estate companies****investment firms****retail stores****oil and gas companies****lawyers****telecommunications companies****labor unions****tobacco companies****entertainment and media companies****GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- Do you think the money industries give to political campaigns through soft money donations or PACs has a lot of influence on the outcome of elections? Why or why not?
- Do you think corporate money has a lot of influence on the decisions the lawmakers we elect make in Congress? Why or why not?

## Campaign Posters *reproducible activity*

Pretend you are running for political office — you might pretend you're running for mayor of your city or town or president of your school's student council. In the space below, design your own campaign poster. Make sure your poster tells the things about you that would make you good at the job you're running for.

### **GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- In your opinion, do political advertisements usually focus on the issues that are most important to voters? Explain your answer.

**Opinions — Campaign Finance Reform** *reproducible activity*

One good way to understand an issue is to learn about all sides of the debate surrounding that issue. Campaign finance has many supporters, but many people strongly oppose limits on campaign fundraising and spending. Using books, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet, find arguments both for and against some of the proposed campaign finance reforms. Make sure you find at least four strong arguments on each side of campaign money debate. List the arguments you find below. Then, after you have researched the issue thoroughly, write a short essay explaining your opinion on this issue. You can use the arguments you list below to support your point of view in your essay. Try to answer the arguments you found for the other side of the debate, too.

**Arguments supporting campaign finance reform:**

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- 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 4. \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Arguments against campaign finance reform:**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 4. \_\_\_\_\_  
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