



AP Government & Politics: U.S. 2000 Student Samples

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Campaign finance has been an important issue of debate. Although both parties believe that something should be done to stop the corruption, neither group is willing to give up all the money that they risk losing. In order to run for office, it has become more and more costly. It seems evident that politics has become about who has the most money and thus who can last the longest. One of the factors for George W. Bush's success has been his ability to raise so much for his campaign. It has been reported that he raised \$21 million dollars by hosting one dinner. There have been many obstacles in the path to campaign reform, two of the most important ones being soft money and incumbency.

Senator and past presidential hopeful John McCain, sponsored a bill to enact serious campaign reform. Although people believe campaign reform is necessary, the bill gained no support. Neither party was willing to give up soft money that they received for every election. Soft money is money that people send, not directly to the candidate, but to a national organization, so that they may help their candidate more than the legal amount. It is stated that an individual cannot give more than \$1000. But this person can send more money in the name of their other family members, through PACs, or through the national Dem/Rep party. This soft money is necessary to the candidates

because without money they cannot hope to win their election. This reluctance to give this money up makes it difficult for Congress to take it away. No one is willing to give up money, because they know without it, it will be more difficult to win.

Ninety percent of incumbents get reelected to office. The reason for the strong return rate (sometimes referred to as the "sophomore surge" for second term Congressmen) is franking privileges, name recognition, & constituent services. Their name recognition also helps incumbents get more money from PACs & special interest groups. If Congress enacted strict campaign finance guidelines, it would be the incumbents that would be suffering the greatest amount of financial loss. Incumbency is when the person who runs for office is the same person who is currently holding the job. The incumbents do not want to lose such a large amount of funding from PACs, interest groups, individuals, and soft money. Their defensive attitude towards holding their position makes it impossible for them to give up the money which may allow them to win again. These people know how much this money can do for them. They will not give that up.

Soft money and incumbency are closely related obstacles in Congress' enactment of campaign reform. The incumbents do not want to lose the soft money contributions to their campaign and thus they will not vote for campaign reform.

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measures. If they do not vote to pass the legislation, then no campaign reform will take place. But by passing the campaign finance reform bill, the incumbents are signing away hundreds of thousands of dollars. Money that could make the difference between victory and defeat.

Although Congress has attempted to pass laws reforming the once-corrupt (now only slightly so) campaign finance system, soft money and incumbency have provided obstacles to further reforms.

Soft money is funding given to candidates that is used for purposes such as improving voter turnout in an area or sending out mailings to local citizens. It is differentiated from hard money, which goes directly to a candidate's bank account and is used to pay for traveling expenses, advertisements, and staffers (if appropriate). Contributors can give soft money to candidates without limit, whereas hard money from PACs and individuals is strictly monitored by the government. Since soft money is often masked in intentions furthering the public good—increasing voter awareness, helping sustain a political party—and is less tangible and traceable than hard money, laws regarding it are difficult to create. In addition, restricting or limiting the amount of soft money a candidate can receive gives challengers a disadvantage and forces candidates to accept money from other unequalizing sources, such as their personal finances and illegal donors.

Incumbents enjoy a serious advantage over challengers in fundraising. Due to service to their constituents and exposure, they are virtually guaranteed reelection, and ~~donors~~ donors back them more heavily as a result. Incumbents in Congress have the financial advantage of franking, which allows them to send mailings to

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constituents free of postage, giving them a financial edge. Congressmen oppose cutting down on franking privileges, ~~saying~~ saying that it is needed to inform voters and is not ~~essentially~~ used only ~~to~~ for advertising. In addition, more PACs support incumbents than challengers, due to their dealings with interest groups while already in office. In their previous term(s), they may have ~~helped~~ supported legislation that the PACs favored, leading to the PACs supporting the candidate's reelection. Congress has problems limiting these PAC donations, since they do not give large sums of money in general, which violates no current campaign finance laws. The money comes ~~to~~ to incumbents due to interest group and PAC support of the candidate's positions or past legislation, a factor that cannot be passed on to the challenger by passing laws, since the challenger has never had the opportunity to serve in Congress before.

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thousand dollar, they are going to continue to support their candidate.

Due to the fact that the campaigning process as a whole is so expensive the candidates need as much money as possible. And because "early money is like yeast," the incumbents will continue to do better. It is safe to say that because the process is so costly, Congress will never be able to enact campaign finance reforms that put an end to soft money and incumbency.