**INTEREST GROUPS**

**Campaigns and Elections: Democracy in Action**

Welcome to campaign headquarters for the 2012 presidential election. Money will fly, accusations will run rampant, voters will be convinced and when the dust clears the country will have selected the President. As a team you will be instrumental in helping Americans make that choice

**Your mission is simple: Use this campaign to advance your political agenda as far as you can.**

*Here’s what you’ll learn:*

* All about Interest Groups and their real and imagined impact on campaigns.
* All about the media and how it establishes the parameters of all elections, sometimes despite the candidate’s best efforts.
* How candidates are nominated and how they campaign
* The role of political parties in elections
* The electoral behavior of American citizens
* The difference between federal, state, and local elections
* The money game and how the government tries to control elections to make them more fair
* How to construct an argument that will sway voters
* How to manage the resources of a campaign: particularly money and time.
* How to defeat your opponents through rhetorical skill

***What you’ll do:***

There will be four interest groups at play—2 liberal and 2 conservative.

You will use money, publicity, access and influence to shape the race, ultimately backing a candidate and assisting their campaign.

***The Tasks*:**

* Introduction and Endorsement Questionnaire
* Race analysis—what this race means to you and your members
* Hosting a Primary Debate for your side
* A Campaign Plan and Ad
* Endorsement Event / Get-out-the-vote ad

**The Race for the Presidency**

**The Current Political State of the Country:**
Democrats had been making big gains in the last 8 years taking control of both houses of Congress and the White House, but losing the House of Representatives. Now the political winds are shifting. Anger over the President’s policies has given rise to an active conservative movement that has been quite successful in pushing more mainstream GOP candidates out, and making compromise less and less appealing to many.

On the Democratic side, many party activists are frustrated with the moderate policies coming out of Washington and are disappointed in the leadership they aren’t seeing. Many of these activists would prefer a more committed liberal to be their nominee, and want the incumbent to represent a more liberal, activist base.

Candidates must establish themselves as true representatives of the people of their state who are not going to be swayed by Washington insiders. They must show they understand the particular issues of their state and have a plan about how they will take those to Washington and demand action.

**The Issues:**

**The Economy**: When Bill Clinton ran for the Presidency in 1992, his mantra was “It’s the economy, stupid!” Now that we’re in the 2012 election cycle, that mantra is equally critical. Voters care the most about issues that impact them personally and nothing is more personal than their paychecks and their bills. The housing crisis has hit a number of communities very hard and job losses are an issue in every state. Candidates need to have a very strong message on the economy that is pretty central to their theme. While Interest Groups are not particularly concerned about the economy as their focus, they should think about how they can support their candidates in making an economic statement.

**The War and Foreign Policy:** The United States is engaged in two wars—in Iraq and in Afghanistan. The wars are very popular among Republicans who see them as a necessary evil in the fight against terrorism. Democrats see these as the wrong wars in the wrong places at the wrong times. Allegations of torture of suspected enemy combatants have only made this worse. While the President has promised that the US will be out of Iraq in a matter of months, he has dramatically increased the number of troops in Afghanistan often to the detriment of states who lose their National Guardsmen and women for extended deployments.

**Social Issues:** Education has been a major issue that has dominated state budget negotiations. While most people believe accountability for teachers and students is a good thing, the new requirements did not come with enough funding attached and school districts are forced to lay off teachers in order to hire testers. For candidates who are governors this is a great wedge issue to show how out of touch Washington is. For candidates in Congress they are going to need to find a narrative that will help them explain why they did not take better care with this issue initially. Another social issue getting play is the robustness of the safety net for people who lose their jobs and slip into poverty. This is another area where state vs federal experience will come into play since so much of the issue is budgeting and access.

**Health Care and the Environment:** Health care has been a perennial issue in American politics for many years, but this year candidates have something concrete to discuss—Obama’s health care plan that passed in the fall of 2009. This plan would require all Americans to have health insurance and would impose tax penalties if they fail to purchase insurance and they meet specific income guidelines. People on the right say this is an incredible denial of individual rights and possibly not Constitutional. Liberals feel that the policy doesn’t go far enough because it doesn’t guarantee health care to everyone, and it doesn’t make it more affordable for people. Both sides still have room to define themselves on the issue as they will be responsible for budgeting for the program and will have the opportunity to repeal the act.

**The Candidates: President Barry Washington (D)**

President Barry Washington has been the United States President since his landmark election in 2008. Therefore, President Washington is an incumbent; he currently holds the office of the Presidency and is running for re-election. Prior to his election, he served as a Senator from the state of Illinois

He has used his time in office to become known as a compromiser, one who will walk across the party lines to try to reach agreements between the opposing political views. President Washington’s policy decisions have addressed a global financial crisis, legislation to reform the health care system, foreign policy initiatives, and dealing with war in Afghanistan and troops in Iraq.

**What he has going FOR him:**

President Washington has had success in a difficult legislative arena. He pushed for major healthcare reform, the end of discrimination against homosexuals in the military, and financial regulatory reform.

President Washington and his administration announced in May 2011 the operation that resulted in the death of the infamous terrorist Osama Bin Laden. Bin Laden, the man behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, had been hunted for almost 10 years and President Washington was able to capitalize on the success of this operation.

President Washington has been incredibly popular. When he entered office in 2009, his approval rating was 82%. Throughout his first two years as President, his approval ratings stayed above 50%, often well into the 60% range. He does incredibly well in front of audiences and projects a calm, encouraging demeanor on camera that really works with female votes particularly. The three words most often used to describe him are steadfast, loyal, and compassionate.

**What he has going AGAINST him:**

Policy gridlock in Congress has been a consistent problem for President Washington. Since 2010, the House of Representatives has been controlled by Republicans while the Democrats have control of the Senate. Because he doesn’t take a strong stand on the issues and tries to play the middle ground, he is not usually viewed as a leader. Who wants a follower for President?

President Washington is faced with the slow recovery of the US economy. After pushing for passage of stimulus bill called the “American Recovery and Reinvestment Act” in 2009, many Americans expected a quicker economic recovery. Unemployment is still high and Americans are frustrated with the slow progress.

While his favorable numbers are high among moderate voters, his approval ratings have dropped among liberal voters who don’t think he’s liberal enough and conservative voters who are looking to replace him with a Republican leader.

**Notable Supporters:**

President Washington enjoys support from traditional democratic allies and has a fairly easy time raising money from them for his re-elections for the Presidency.

**The Bottom Line:**

**President Washington has an incredible opportunity to make himself the dependable, cautious leader that is needed during this time of chaos but he has to do it fast. If his opponents define him first, he may not get another chance with the voters.**

**The Candidates: Representative Maria Mills (R)**

Maria Mills is a member of the United States House of Representative, representing Minnesota 6th congressional district, and a candidate for the Republican nomination in the 2012 U.S. presidential election.  As the first Republican to be elected to the U.S. House from Minnesota, she has built an impressive record as a supporter of conservative social issues spanning from anti-abortion to banning gay marriage. Mills attributes much of her political ideology to her strong Evangelical Christian beliefs, which shapes her views on education, fiscal, and social policies.

Mills has gained national attention when she was elected into the U.S. House of Representatives as the first Republican from Minnesota in 2006.  Her political activism began when she and her husband were
inspired to join the pro-life movement in 1976.  Disappointed with the recent liberal approach to public policies, Mills ran for Minnesota Senate in 2000, defeating an 18-year incumbent.  Following her political success in the Minnesota Senate, Mills successfully won the 6th Congressional seat with support largely from social conservative backings.  Most recently, she has become the face of the Tea Party Movement.

**What she has going FOR her:**
She's passionate about social issues.  She has a charismatic personality.  Her work with foster children, who have eating disorders, has gained praise and approval from politicians across the political spectrum.  Her devotion to her family resonates well with many conservative American beliefs.

Her voter base loves her.  In the eyes of social conservatives, she has become the leader of their crusade, as a supporter of the Tea Party Movement.  She has gained media attention since announcing her candidacy for the Republican nomination, with her voter base growing as people become disenchanted with the current bureaucracy.

**What she has going AGAINST her:**
The current incumbent president is extremely popular.  She is not as well-known across the nation as some candidates.  While she is wildly popular with social conservatives, others may see her as an rightwing extremist.

While voters in other parts of the country don't know her well, polling consistently shows that Americans don't believe a woman will be as effective as a man in the role of President.  She has to convince them of both women generally and of herself as the right woman for the job.

**Notable Supporters:**
Social Conservatives, Evangelical Christians, women, and Members and supports of the Tea Party Movement.

**The Bottom Line:**

**Mills has a long ways to go to convince Americans that a woman can lead, but if she has a strong political base to help her get started. If she can overcome the stigma of being too conservative, she will have a good chance in winning the Republican Nomination and the presidency.The Candidates: Governor Mike Lewis, (R)**

Mike Lewis has wanted to be President ever since his high school government class and has been building his resume ever since. He started by coming from a good family—his father George Lewis was Governor of Texas and also a cabinet official. Governor Lewis went to the University of Texas where he majored in business. Soon after graduating he opened a construction business that has become one of the most successful businesses in the area. He is known for not only being a great businessman, but also for treating his employees incredibly well. He was elected Governor of Texas after the Republican Party was unable to find a good candidate and drafted him. He ran on an aggressively positive platform and was called “The Golden Boy”. He is fiscally very conservative and cut taxes every year of his term.

**What he has going FOR him:**
As the popular Governor of a state with 34 electoral votes he has the potential to initiate a land slide of an election if he can hold it.

He looks the part; he’s young and has a beautiful family who are the pillars of their community. Because of their work for charity and his business there is no end to the “Mike Lewis helped me” stories which make for great commercials. His Texan roots give him some Southern appeal.

**What he has going AGAINST him:**While Governor Lewis has made few enemies as governor, he also hasn’t made a lot of friends. He doesn’t inspire people and while they like him, they also don’t really remember a lot about him. He’s going to have to get some fire.

He’s not a great public speaker. He’s decent and open to training but that all takes time.

At the beginning of his career he bought out a rival company which made a lot of people unhappy. It wouldn’t take much to find one of these people to accuse him of unethical business practices which he’s never been able to respond well to.

**Notable Supporters:**He’s supported by general Republican supporters—small businessmen, the NRA, and anti-big government groups. If he can prove himself on issues close to social and religious conservatives he could easily become their candidate of choice.

**The Bottom Line:**

**Governor Lewis needs to show Americans that he has a lot more going for him than just his good looks and easy manner. Showing his intelligence on conservative issues and the depth that he has will benefit him tremendously in the national race.**

**The Candidates: Representative Taylor Hanson, (R)**

Taylor Hanson was never interested in politics until about half way through the Bush Administration when he realized that his brand of conservatism wasn’t being represented anywhere. He took his argument to the airwaves in Massachusetts and was then elected to Congress in the most surprising race of the year—he unseated an incumbent Republican in the primary and then crushed his Democratic opponent. He is unexpected, he was the manager of a Wal-Mart before he got into Congress but he has a dedicated group of followers who see him as the only true conservative in Congress at a time when liberalism is run amok.

In Congress he has declined leadership roles because he believes the current party system to be fraught with liars who don’t really want to help America. He instead focused his staff on providing excellent constituent service and publishing regular dispatches called “The Real Washington” where he called out colleagues by name for what he perceived to be crises of conscience. Consequently, his support inside DC is weak.

**What he has going FOR him**:
Congressman Hanson has the most committed group of supporters who routinely give him money and service for his campaigns. There is nothing they won’t do to keep him in office.

Hanson has a strong online fundraising base which allows him to spend relatively little of his time raising money and a lot of his time interacting with voters.

Hanson has a really clear, strong message that resonates with voters in Massachusetts. He is very black and white in his view of issues and is not shy about stating his views. For independent voters who are tired of politicians, he is a breath of fresh air.

Hanson is a compelling public speaker who has a strong story of his own disillusionment with politics over his life. He talks about rekindling his fire through his outreach to other voters just like him in an incredibly compelling way.

**What he has going AGAINST him:**He does not want to convince voters that he’s right on the issues. He believes that voters will either see it his way or they are hopelessly ignorant which turns off anyone who likes his style but disagrees with him on some issues.

He is very distrustful of the mainstream press and sees them all as liberal propagandists. His suspicions often lead to his refusing to work with the traditional press and to only work with bloggers perceived to be on his side.

**Notable Supporters:**
Extremely conservative independents like him a lot. He was supported by the NRA in his Congressional race as well as Pro-Life America. American’s for Tax Reform also support him and send a lot of money his way.

**The Bottom Line:**

**Many voters are looking to be inspired in a Presidential campaign and Hanson has that possibility if his team can convince him to allow some grey to come into the issues. The challenge will be to keep his honesty as they try to smooth his edges.**

**Interest Group: National Rifle Association (NRA)**

Format: Single Issue Group.

The National Rifle Association is committed to the protection of the 2nd amendment and opposes almost all forms of gun control. Perennially listed at or near the top of the Forbes’ Top 25 Interest Group Power Ranking, the NRA can make or break a conservative candidacy. Nationally they have 4 million committed members. Their singular focus makes them more powerful than some other interest groups with a larger but less-committed membership. For many conservatives, a candidate’s position on gun control is a litmus test for their support, and the NRA “scores” candidates on their stance on this issue. They also organize, lobby Congress, and support pro-gun candidates.

**Interest Group: NARAL Pro-Choice America**

Format: Single Issue Group.

Just as guns can be a “litmus test” issue for many conservatives, stance on abortion and Roe v. Wade is just as singular an issue for many liberals. NARAL Pro Choice America is the foremost group dedicated to pro-choice politics, with more than one million members and supporters. This organization works in grassroots organizing, electing pro-choice candidates, lobbying Congress and conducting political research and analysis.

**Interest Group: Service Employees International Union (SEIU)**

Format: Labor Union.

In an era where labor unions’ size and power is diminishing, SEIU is the fastest growing labor union in North America, with over 2.2 million members. Its members work in three fields: health care (doctors, nurses, lab technicians, home care workers, etc.), public services (including local government workers, bus drivers and child care providers) and property services (workers who protect and clean commercial and residential office buildings). SEIU does grassroots and net roots organizing on issues like health care, immigration advocacy, and poverty action. They also work for better conditions and pay for their employees. Members pay dues for basic union services (salary negotiation, job protection), and may also elect to contribute money for political action.

**Interest Group: American Conservative Union (ACU)**

Format: Multi-issue lobbying organization.

The ACU describes itself as the nation’s “oldest and largest grassroots conservative lobbying organization.” Some critical issues for this group include promoting conservative nominees for Supreme Court justice, fighting for lower taxes and reducing government spending. At the same time, they promote a bold military stance around the world. The ACU “scores” members of Congress on their adherence to conservative principles on a scale of 0 to 100. They also produce conservative publications and contribute to conservative candidates.

**The Strategy Guide**

**Roles:**Each interest group team has two principal actors: *the Spokesperson and the Manager*. Your first task is to decide who will fulfill which role for the primary. You will switch for the General Election. Please refer to the following job descriptions:

***The Spokesperson*:** The spokesperson is the public face of the interest group. They will deliver all prepared remarks as well as grant interviews to the media or conduct media events with candidates. They have the most public role so any issues with the campaign plan, media strategy, or fundraising will reflect directly on them.

***The Manager*:** The manager is responsible for managing the spokesperson and as such are responsible for developing the campaign plan, the media strategy, and any campaign material that is produced. Their job is to provide background comments for the media, to coordinate the efforts with candidates, like-minded interest groups or press. The manager is the gate keeper and must ultimately approve all decisions made on strategy political agenda.

**Tools:**

**People:** Each interest group has a core base of support that they can mobilize to make contributions, help turn out the vote and help spread the message. The more people you have to do this, the more effective you’ll be in getting your message out there.

**Money:** There’s no denying it—money= power in politics, but particularly in the interest group game. In addition to thinking about how to raise money effectively, interest groups must also think about how to spend it wisely and in ways that will maximize influence. When it comes to campaigns, there are two kinds of spending—hard and soft. Hard money is the money you have to be accountable for, soft is unregulated and un-definable ☺

**Media:**  Media strategy is every bit as important to interest groups as it is to campaigns. Your goal is to have your message, tag line, or some policy initiative that you support be mentioned once a week by EITHER the candidate teams OR the media.

**The Assignments: Interest Groups**

**Task 1: Introduction to Interest Groups and the Endorsement Questionnaire Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**The Task: Each interest group team will research their interest group and give a short presentation to the class about their role in the elections process. Then, the team will create an endorsement questionnaire with which to help determine which candidate to back. The questions created should provide you with enough information to gauge who your group will plan to support. There is no limit to the number of questions you can ask of the candidate about your issue.

*Who can help: All interest group team members should work together and produce endorsement questionnaires.*

**Task 2: Race Analysis Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

The Task: Each interest group team will complete a race analysis. This will include initial impressions on who you may back and how you plan to impact the race. You’ll also need to think about 5 targeted swing states and assess your membership and resources in those key battlegrounds.

*Who can help: All interest group team members should work together in putting this plan together.*

**Task 3: Hosting the Primary Debate Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** The Task: The Republican candidates will engage in a 30 minute debate on the issues to sway primary voters to their side. Interest groups will be responsible for conducting this debate including formulating questions, working out the staging, and hosting the event. While the three Republican candidates will be invited to participate, this event does not necessarily need to be fair to candidates that you don’t support. Be strategic!

*Who can help: All interest groups WILL NEED TO work together in planning and putting on the debate.*

**Task 4: Endorsement Event and Advertisement Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

The Task: Regardless of whether your primary candidate won, it’s time to put your full support behind your general election candidate. The two candidates are gearing up for their final debate, but before they can do that, they must get endorsed by your team! You will hold an endorsement event in the days leading up to the big day. This should really make both your candidate and your organization stand out. You will also need to create an “issue” ad.

*Who can help: All interest group team members need to work together in planning and creating the campaign plan and issue ad.*

**Task 5: Campaign Plan and GOTV Ad Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**The Task: You have now put your full support behind one candidate. Think about how you can most effectively assist his or her campaign. The campaign plan needs to outline how you’ll motivate your members and other political allies to support your candidate. The candidate teams will be rolling out their campaign strategy and your group should be meeting with them to determine how you can help as well as aid in creating your plan.

Using your campaign plan create an ad (a 30-60 second commercial or a poster) supporting your endorsed candidate OR attacking your opponent. This should speak to people who are members of your interest group, but still maintain a wide appeal to attract independents.

*Who can help: All interest group team members work together in creating the GOTV Ad and Endorsement Event.*