The Price of Influence

Trace how competing groups seek to shape drug policy.

SS24.USG.8b "Analyze examples of legislation or policy decisions that reflect the influence of special interest groups, and describe methods by which these groups seek to sway the policy-making process."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline what each law allowed or barred, circle each interest group, and number the methods the groups used to influence lawmakers. Use your marks to compare each group's goals, tactics, and results.

The Fight Over Medicare Drug Prices

1. In 2003, Congress passed a law creating Medicare Part D, a prescription drug benefit delivered through private plans. The law barred the federal government from directly negotiating drug prices for the Part D program. Pharmaceutical companies, represented by the trade group PhRMA, favored that restriction because direct bargaining by a large buyer could push prices down. PhRMA lobbyists met with lawmakers and argued that lower revenues could reduce investment in new medicines. The final law included the restriction, but that match alone does not prove the group's lobbying caused it. Lawmakers also considered arguments about how private plans should compete.

2. Almost two decades later, Congress revisited the issue. The 2022 Inflation Reduction Act authorized Medicare to negotiate prices for a limited number of high-spending prescription drugs, with the first negotiated prices taking effect in 2026. AARP, an organization representing older Americans, urged members to contact lawmakers and supported negotiation as a way to lower costs for patients and taxpayers. PhRMA opposed the negotiation provision, arguing that it could discourage the development of new drugs. The two groups sought different outcomes from the same decision, and each used public messages to frame what was at stake.

3. The 2022 law did not erase every limit on negotiation: only selected drugs qualify, and the program began with a small number. That narrower design shows why policy outcomes rarely match one group's entire wish list. To assess influence, compare a group's stated goal with the text of a law, then trace the group's methods, such as lobbying, advertising, or organizing voters. Timing matters too: a group may spend heavily and still lose a vote. In this case, the shift from a ban in 2003 to limited negotiation in 2022 reveals a policy change amid competing pressure, not proof that either group controlled Congress.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which provision of the 2003 law matched PhRMA's goal, and how did PhRMA try to influence lawmakers?

2. How did AARP's goal for the 2022 law differ from PhRMA's, and what method did AARP use?

3. How did the 2022 law reflect AARP's position without granting everything supporters of negotiation might want?

4. Why does the 2003 law's agreement with PhRMA's position not prove that PhRMA caused the restriction?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A state is considering a bill requiring appliance makers to provide repair parts and manuals. In five or six sentences, identify two groups with competing interests, one method each could use to sway lawmakers, a plausible compromise, and why that outcome alone would not prove either group caused it.

ANSWER KEY

The Price of Influence

GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.8b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline what each law allowed or barred, circle each interest group, and number the methods the groups used to influence lawmakers. Use your marks to compare each group's goals, tactics, and results. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which provision of the 2003 law matched PhRMA's goal, and how did PhRMA try to influence lawmakers?	**The law barred direct federal negotiation of Part D drug prices. PhRMA lobbyists met with lawmakers and argued that lower revenues could reduce investment in new medicines.**
2	How did AARP's goal for the 2022 law differ from PhRMA's, and what method did AARP use?	**AARP supported negotiation to lower costs, while PhRMA opposed it. AARP urged members to contact lawmakers.**
3	How did the 2022 law reflect AARP's position without granting everything supporters of negotiation might want?	**The law authorized Medicare to negotiate drug prices, but only for a limited number of selected drugs.**
4	Why does the 2003 law's agreement with PhRMA's position not prove that PhRMA caused the restriction?	**A matching outcome is not proof of causation because lawmakers also considered other arguments, including how private plans should compete.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Independent repair shops could support the bill because access to parts and manuals would help them serve customers. They might organize customers to call legislators about repair costs. Appliance makers could oppose a broad requirement because they worry about safety and protecting proprietary designs. They might meet with lawmakers and propose limits on access to certain technical information. A compromise could require parts and basic manuals while exempting sensitive security details, but the law's resemblance to either group's proposal would not, by itself, prove that group caused the outcome.

Accept other passage-supported explanations that connect a group's goal and method to a policy decision. For the open task, accept plausible groups and methods if the response distinguishes a possible influence from proof of causation.