**How Well Does Congress Represent the American People?**

The U.S. Congress is tasked with representing the interests of the American people—but **what does that mean in practice**? Representation isn’t just about winning elections or passing laws. It also involves who donates to campaigns, what kinds of industries influence members, and how legislative priorities reflect the needs of diverse constituents.

In the modern era, **campaign finance**, **lobbying**, and **partisan dynamics** all influence congressional behavior. Some members rely heavily on **large individual donations** or **political action committees (PACs)**, while others depend more on **grassroots support**. Meanwhile, members introduce and sponsor legislation that may—or may not—align with the communities they represent.

By analyzing the fundraising profiles and legislative records of current members of Congress, students can begin to answer a core civic question: **Are elected officials working for the public good or for special interests?**

**Key Terms and Definitions**

| **Term** | **Definition** |
| --- | --- |
| Representation | The act of elected officials serving as voices for their constituents in a legislative body. |
| Constituents | The residents of a member's district or state, whom they are elected to represent. |
| Political Action Committee (PAC) | An organization that collects and donates money to political candidates on behalf of interest groups. |
| Campaign Finance | The fundraising and spending involved in political campaigns, regulated by federal law. |
| OpenSecrets.org | A nonpartisan research site that tracks money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy. |
| Congress.gov | The official website for U.S. federal legislative information, including bills, resolutions, and voting records. |

**Orienting Question**

**How well does Congress represent the American people, and how can we evaluate the influence of campaign donations and legislation on that representation?**

**Active Learning Assignment: Money, Influence, and Representation**

**Overview:**

You will investigate four current members of Congress—two senators and two representatives—using nonpartisan public data. By analyzing their campaign finance reports and their legislative activity, you will develop a clearer picture of **how money and policy intersect in American democracy**.

**Directions:**

For each of the following members of Congress, visit their profiles on:

* [**OpenSecrets.org**](https://www.opensecrets.org)
* [**Congress.gov**](https://www.congress.gov)

Answer the following questions **for each politician**:

**🧾 Campaign Finance – Use OpenSecrets.org**

1. **How much cash does this politician have on hand for their next election?**
2. **Who are their three top contributors?**
3. **What are the top two industries contributing to their campaign?**
4. **Do most of their donations come from:**
   * PACs
   * Large individual contributions
   * Small individual contributions?

**📜 Legislative Behavior – Use Congress.gov**

1. **Provide the number and title of two bills this politician introduced in 2025.**  
   (Example: *H.R. 1234 – Student Loan Relief Act of 2025*)

**Members to Research**

**1. Buddy Carter (U.S. Representative, Georgia)**

* OpenSecrets Profile
* Congress.gov Profile

**2. Jon Ossoff (U.S. Senator, Georgia)**

* OpenSecrets Profile
* [Congress.gov Profile](https://www.congress.gov/member/jon-ossoff/O000174)

**3. Raphael Warnock (U.S. Senator, Georgia)**

* OpenSecrets Profile
* [Congress.gov Profile](https://www.congress.gov/member/raphael-warnock/W000790)

**4. Mike Johnson (Speaker of the House)**

* OpenSecrets Profile
* [Congress.gov Profile](https://www.congress.gov/member/mike-johnson/J000299)

**Final Reflection Prompt:**

After completing your research on all four politicians, respond to the following in a short paragraph (5–7 sentences):

Based on your findings, how well do you think Congress represents the American public? Does campaign finance influence legislative behavior? What surprised you?

**Review Questions**

1. What tools can citizens use to evaluate how well their representatives are serving them?
2. Why is it important to examine both campaign finance and legislative activity when judging a member of Congress?
3. What patterns did you notice in the industries contributing to multiple politicians?
4. How might campaign donations affect which bills get introduced or supported?
5. What reforms (if any) would help make Congress more representative of ordinary Americans?