

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Obama Shatters Fundraising Records, Reigniting Public Finance Debate

10/21/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec08/funds_10-21.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

Student Worksheet (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the things presidential candidates need to pay for when they are campaigning?

2. Where do political candidates get money to pay for their campaigns?

3. Would you ever donate money to a campaign?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

1. How much money did Barack Obama raise in September?

ANSWER

Democrat Barack Obama's campaign raised a record-smashing \$150 million in the month of September, putting him on track to inject the most money into any election in history, and perhaps making the public financing system irrelevant.

2. What strategies did Obama use to reach so many donors?

ANSWER

The campaign has used social networking Web sites like Facebook and MySpace as well as e-mails and cell phone texts to reach out to a broader population of potential donors than past campaigns.

3. What do candidates have to give up if they accept the \$84 million in public financing?

ANSWER

The system offers presidential candidates \$84 million from the U.S. Treasury, but prohibits them from accepting private money.

4. How many presidential candidates have refused public financing for the general election?

ANSWER

Obama is the first major-party presidential candidate to reject public financing for the general election since the system was enacted in 1974.

5. Where does the money for the public financing come from?

ANSWER

The U.S. Treasury pays money to the campaigns from the Presidential Election Campaign Fund, which comes from \$3 voluntary contributions by citizens when they file their taxes.

6. Why was the public financing system created?

ANSWER

The idea behind the public financing system is that both candidates would have the same amount, a taxpayer-financed grant, so that fundraising becomes less of a factor in how the candidates campaign. One of the goals was to rid the election process of the impact of funds from special interest groups looking for favors and support from Washington.

7. How have special interest groups gotten around the public financing rules?

ANSWER

However, special interest groups have found loops holes to exert their influence, and spend large amounts of money by directly producing ads for their favored candidate, without going through the campaigns.

8. How will the extra money help Obama in his campaign?

ANSWER

Obama can spend more money on ads and staff in more states. It gives the campaign the freedom to spend money in battle ground states, or Republican leaning states.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What is your response to Obama promising to participate in the public finance system and then changing his mind? Was it the right thing to do or was it a mistake? Why?

2. Why is it significant that the average contribution to Obama's campaign is less than \$100?

3. What are the pros and cons of having a public financing system?

4. Imagine you are tasked with deciding what to do with the public financing system before the next presidential election in 2012. Would you make it mandatory, leave it the way it is, make other changes or get rid of it? Explain your answer.

5. Research a special interest group that has been buying ads for one of the candidates. Who runs the group? Why might they be concerned about who wins the election?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.