Debate Over Interest Groups

**Positive**

1. James Madison believed that factions were inevitable and that a republican form of government would allow groups to balance each other so that none could become too powerful.

2. Interest groups provide additional representation for the public in Congress. People can be represented in terms of their economic, social, or occupational interests.

3. A pressure group also serves as a watchdog and can protest government policies that might harm its members.

**Negative**

1. James Madison warned the new nation against the dangerous side of “factions,” which he defined as “a number of citizens . . . who are united by some common impulse . . . adverse to the rights of other citizens” (Federalist 10, 1787). Today, the competition among interest groups can cripple efforts to change policy.

2. The greatest concern over interest groups in recent years has been their contributions to political campaigns. Many argue that interest groups have far too much control over members of Congress.

3. Regulating lobbying by interest groups is difficult. By law, all lobbyists must register with the clerk of the House and the secretary of the Senate; however, only interest groups that claim their primary function to be lobbying must register. Consequently, only 6,000 of a possible 13,600 interest groups register as lobbyists, and no enforcement agency exists.

In no country in the world has the principle of association been more successfully used, or applied to a greater multitude of objects, than in America . . . In the United States associations are established to promote the public safety, commerce, industry, morality and religion.

Alexis de Tocqueville
Democracy in America
1835