

What do lobbyists do?

WHAT'S IN THIS SECTION

In this section you will read about the role of lobbyists in the political process. You will find:

- Information about lobbyists.
- Two interviews with lobbyists sharing their views about representing Canadians.

What are you looking for?

As you read this section, look for:

- What lobbyists do.
- The extent to which lobbyists represent Canadians in the political process.
- How lobbyists can influence government decision making.

CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE
How might lobbyists affect political decision making and the lives of Canadians?

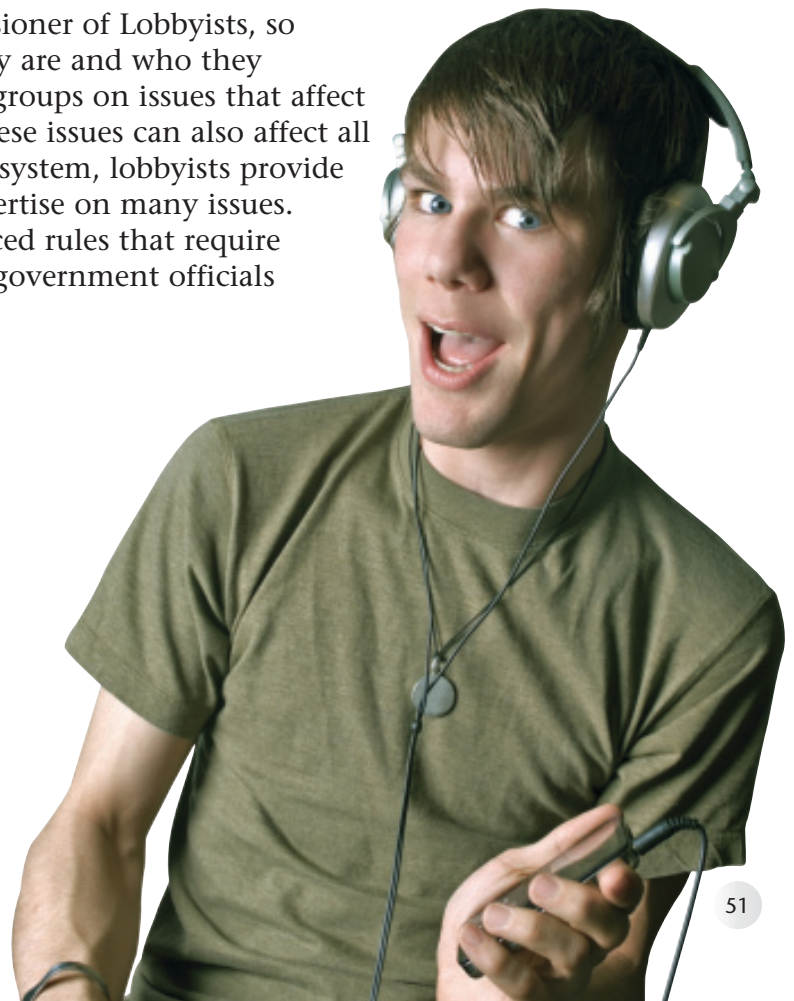
Who are lobbyists?

- A lobbyist is someone hired by a group to influence MPs and government officials.
- Lobbyists must register with a Commissioner of Lobbyists, so everyone in Canada can know who they are and who they represent. Lobbyists voice the views of groups on issues that affect their members, products or services. These issues can also affect all Canadians. Within the federal political system, lobbyists provide different perspectives and in-depth expertise on many issues.
- The Federal Accountability Act introduced rules that require lobbyists to document which MPs and government officials they meet with.

The entertainment industry has lobbyists who work to influence laws about downloading music, movies and TV shows.



Lobbying by groups such as the Non-Smokers' Rights Association has resulted in tougher controls on smoking, including government warnings on cigarette packages and bans on smoking in public places.



How do lobbyists see their role?

Lobbyists represent the views and perspectives of different groups on issues that affect Canadians. For example, lobbyists are part of a debate about the development of the oil sands in Alberta.

Pierre Alvarez is president of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP), based in Calgary, Alberta. CAPP represents 150 companies that explore for, develop and produce more than 95 percent of Canada's natural gas, crude oil, oil sands and elemental sulphur.



I have a son in Grade 9, and a son and a daughter in Grade 7. I tell them that business and government have become complex and so have the issues — climate change, for example. Government doesn't have a monopoly on good ideas or right answers. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers brings technical expertise that helps make better decisions. And I think we are just as important to good decision making as lobbyists for the environment movement.

Many times, the best work we do comes from processes where government, ourselves and the environmental community are all around the table, all bringing our expertise, and challenging each other to find a better solution.

This photo shows an oil sands upgrader near Fort McMurray, Alberta. **Think critically:** Why might the oil sands have become a focus of lobbying by different groups?



CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE

To what extent do lobbyists represent Canadians? In what ways do they help or hinder effective government decision making around issues?



Many different organizations speak directly to government decision makers. We're one of them. But, unlike the oil industry or other corporate groups, we have nothing to gain financially from what we do.

We deal with the environmental implications of energy development. We put forward solutions, identify priorities and build a case for change. With the oil sands, for example, we have raised awareness with the media and the public about the key environmental consequences of oil sands development. It's put more pressure on the government to take action.

We clash with industry sometimes, like when we seek more controls on the oil sands industry. We also work with industry. We're involved in a number of organizations that seek consensus on issues. People bring their interests to the table, including industry people, and we all try to come up with a way to work together and move ahead.



Chris Severson-Baker is the director of Energy Watch with the Pembina Institute. The Pembina Institute is based in Alberta and works to advance green sources of energy.

connect to the big ideas

1. How does each of the lobbyists see their role in representing Canadians? In what areas do they agree or disagree? How different are their points of view? Draw an organizer like the one below to help you summarize their comments. Which point of view do you agree with most? Why? What might some other views be? Add these to your organizer.



2. To play a part in Canada's federal political system, people take on many roles. With a small group, list all the roles you have learned about in this chapter. How involved in the federal political system are people in each role? Use a continuum like the one below to rank each role. Consider where you would rank your own level of involvement on the continuum.



3. In your chapter task, you are acting as prime minister. Describe how a lobbyist might influence your decisions as prime minister.