“Interest Groups”
Guide to Responding

1. Read about the various types of interest groups from the reading in subunit 3.2. In which category does this interest group belong? Why?

AFSCME would be considered an Economic Interest Group, based on the fact that, as a labor union, they seek some sort of economic advantage for their members. Economic groups work to win private goods, which are benefits that only the members of the group will enjoy. When a labor union agrees to a contract, for example, its members benefit from the contract, whereas nonunion members do not. If there is no private good incentive, people might choose not to join a union (especially if there is a membership fee or dues).

2. Write a short description of the group’s purpose, goals, and/or mission (can usually be found on the group’s official website).

According to their website, AFSCME organizes for social and economic rights of their protectorates in the workplace and through political action and legislative advocacy. Like most unions, AFSCME is involved wide array of public policy issues relevant to the movement. This includes the environment, health care, Medicare, Social Security, retirement security, workers’ rights, workplace safety, privatization, collective bargaining, taxes, and the minimum wage.

3. Describe what types of individuals and/or businesses comprise this group’s membership base.

AFSCME is made up of 3,500 local unions in 46 states representing 1.4 million members who work primarily in local and state government and in the health care industry. Each local union writes its own constitution, holds membership meetings, and elects its own officers. Councils are also a part of AFSCME’s administrative structure, usually grouping together various locals in a geographic area.

4. Determine the group’s history of campaign contributions in federal politics from each election cycle since 1989. What is the total dollar amount the group has donated from 1989 to 2012? What percentage of this amount has been given to Republicans? To Democrats?

From 1989-2012, AFSCME donated $46,167,658 million to federal candidates; 94 percent to Democrats; 1 percent to Republicans.

5. Describe the major issues that matter to this group. Use this information as a backdrop to analyze why they would they give more to one party over another (or, why would they give equally to both)? What is their strategy in doing this? (To answer this last question, think about how the group’s agenda either coincides or clashes with Republican/Democratic party...
AFSCME works on everything from improving unemployment benefits to strengthening job security. Among its biggest priorities are raising the minimum wage, battling efforts to privatize public sector jobs and fighting efforts to substitute vacation time for overtime pay for millions of workers. AFSCME strongly supported Democratic nominee John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election, and actively opposed several of President Bush's second-term initiatives, especially partial privatization of Social Security. During the 2008 presidential election, it strongly supported Barack Obama.

Since the 1930s, a critical component of the Democratic Party coalition has been organized labor. Labor unions made tremendous gains during this time, largely as a result of the pro-union stance of the Roosevelt administration and from legislation enacted by Congress during the early New Deal. The National Industrial Recovery Act (1933) provided for collective bargaining. The 1935 National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act) required businesses to bargain in good faith with any union supported by the majority of their employees.

Republicans, on the other hand, have had a long history of conflict with labor unions. They have supported various legislation on the state and federal levels, including right to work legislation and the Taft-Hartley Act, which gives workers the right not to participate in unions, as opposed to a closed shop, which prohibits workers from choosing not to join unions in workplaces. Some Republicans are opposed to increases in the minimum wage, believing that such increases hurt many businesses by forcing them to cut jobs and services, export jobs overseas, and raise the prices of goods to compensate for the decrease in profit.