

Identifying and Solving American Problems

During each Congressional session, thousands of ideas for legislative bills are proposed and debated in government. The environment, healthcare, housing, the economy, taxation, military spending, wars and homeland security, and education are just a few areas that raise concerns to politicians and the people. Senators and Representatives craft bills from the input of their constituencies. Besides the voters, the president and vice-president, cabinet members and special interest groups actively suggest possible solutions to legislators. In this setting, various groups separate and distribute power to change society. With such diversity in opinions and choices, the process of writing, debating and passing legislation is an extremely intense activity.

The Task

You will assume the role of an influential figure in government. In the spirit of that role, select a problem pertinent to the government, research it, and prepare a proposed legislative bill to solve the issue. To succeed in this endeavor, you need to convince Congress and the president with overwhelming evidence to support your bill with a persuasive presentation. Ordinarily less than one percent of proposed bills actually become laws, which means that a great deal of effort is necessary to ensure victory.

The Products

Students will create a number of products each of which will be assessed on the rubric. Most products are to be inserted into the Hyperlinking Narrative template that students will have copied to their p-drive. The products include the bill, 2 speeches, a commercial, a works cited page, a business letter, and a voting record. Finally, students will prepare a 5-minute presentation of the information from the hyperlinking narrative that will be assessed on the rubric

The Roles

Intended for a class of 26 students. The numbers of cabinet members and lobbyists can be adjusted up or down according to class size.

- Core A1 (26 Students): President (1), Vice-President (1), Senators (6) from the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Mountains, and West; Representatives (7) from the Northeast, Eastern Seaboard, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Mountains, West ; Cabinet Members (5); Lobbyists (6).
- Core B1 (24 Students): President (1), Vice-President (1), Senators (6) from the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Mountains, and West; Representatives (7) from the Northeast, Eastern Seaboard, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Mountains, West ; Cabinet Members (4); Lobbyists (5).
- Core C1 (30 Students): President (1), Vice-President (1), Senators (6) from the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Mountains, and West; Representatives (7) from the Northeast, Eastern Seaboard, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Mountains, West ; Cabinet Members (7); Lobbyists (8).
- Core A2 (26 Students): President (1), Vice-President (1), Senators (6) from the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Mountains, and West; Representatives (7)

- from the Northeast, Eastern Seaboard, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Mountains, West ; Cabinet Members (5); Lobbyists (6).
- Core B2 (20 Students): President (1), Vice-President (1), Senators (6) from the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Mountains, and West; Representatives (7) from the Northeast, Eastern Seaboard, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Mountains, West ; Cabinet Members (2); Lobbyists (3).

Executive Branch

President (1)

Receives advice and discusses proposed legislation with the vice-president and cabinet members. S/he is responsible for endorsing or vetoing bills approved by both legislative houses.

Vice-President (1)

The vice-president will be able to advise the president about legislation during cabinet meetings. The vice-president must oversee all sessions in the Senate and make the deciding vote in the event of a tie.

After the teacher accepts nominations from each core class, s/he holds the election of the students in another class. Then the victorious presidential candidate selects a vice-president. The party of the current president (George W. Bush) determines the chief executives' affiliation.

Cabinet Members (5)

After selecting the problem of interest, the student cabinet members must identify and then represent the department which would be most affected by the problem. In example, a legislative bill to ban genetically engineered foods could involve the Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Health and Human Services, Commerce and Justice.

Legislative Branch

Senators (6)

Each senator will represent one of six American regions. Senators must research, draft and debate bills to address a particular problem. Typically the Senate will convene as one group. Student senators will use the C-Span legislative listings to determine the party affiliation in each area. Whichever party holds greater power in the senator's region will determine his/her party.

The regions:

- Northeast- Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia.
- Southeast- West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Missouri, Kentucky.

- Midwest- Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa.
- Plains- North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas.
- Mountains- Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico.
- West- Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Alaska, Hawaii.

Representatives (7)

Each representative resides in one of seven American regions. Representatives research, draft and debate bills to address a particular problem. Typically the House convenes as one group. One of the representatives will be the Speaker of the House. Student representatives will use the C-Span legislative listings to determine the party affiliation in each area. Whichever party holds greater power in the representative's region will determine his/her party.

The regions:

- Northeast- Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania.
- Eastern Seaboard- Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina.
- Southeast- Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana.
- Midwest- Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri.
- Plains- North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas.
- Mountains- Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico.
- West- Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Alaska, Hawaii.

Speaker of the House

The seven representatives will select a member of the majority party to lead the House of Representative. The speaker facilitates and leads all discussions in open floor sessions.

Judicial Branch

Chief Justice

The classroom teacher will serve as the Chief Justice. This role symbolizes the tasks normally attributed to the nine-member US Supreme Court. During the researching, writing and debating of the bill, the Chief Justice will serve as an independent legal consultant to all participants, checking for compliance with the Constitution.

Special Interest Groups

Lobbyists (6)

Based on the proposed legislation or problem to be solved, five students will serve as lobbyists representing various types of labor, environmental, corporate and ideological groups. **Since corporate and ideological lobbyists carry the most influence, at least two of the lobbyists in each simulation must represent corporations and ideological groups.** Ideally the lobbyists could occupy these roles:

- environmental (1)
- labor (1)
- corporate (2)
- ideological (2)

They must hold meetings with all executive and legislative members to present positions favoring or opposing the bill. Possible lobbying groups include: Greenpeace, AFL-CIO (labor unions), NRA (National Rifle Association), NOW (National Organization of Women), Tobacco Institute, etc.

Technologies Explored

- Use of *Outlook* for email communication and moving documents
- Use of *Outlook* for voting
- Use of *Internet Explorer* for research
- Use of *Research Assistant* for bibliography and note card creation
- Use of *iMovie* for digital video editing of commercials and speeches
- Use of *Quicktime* for saving movies
- Use of *Word* for word processing and hyperlinking
- Use of digital cameras for video and stills
- Use of *Photo Editor* for digital photograph editing
- Use of *Final Cut Pro* for video special effects
- Use of Proxima for presentation
- Use of CD-ROM for research
- Use of *Athena* for research
- Use of CD-Burners to copy projects