



2004

Capitol Forum on America's Future Ballot Report

Students worry about nuclear proliferation, support international cooperation

In programming taking place during the U.S. led war with Iraq, students in seven states place proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons at the top of their list of international concerns. They continue to support international cooperation as a guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy.

When considering a wide range of international issues in the context of discussing America's role in the world, high school students in Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and Utah place the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons on the top of their list of concerns. One in two (47.1 percent) select the statement that "nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons will proliferate and end up in the hands of terrorists" as one of their three top concerns out of a list of thirteen. More than a third of those participat-



Senators Jack Reed (D-RI and Lincoln Chafee (R-RI) talk with students in Rhode Island at the Fifth Annual Rhode Island Capitol Forum.

ing worry that "the United States will drain its resources trying to solve other countries' problems (34.5 percent)." Almost as many are concerned that "damage to the global environment will become irreparable" (31.3 percent). "By a margin of more than seven to one of those expressing a view, students say that they believe that "many serious problems can be addressed only through international cooperation." (69.8 percent support or strongly support this statement, while only 9.8 percent oppose it.) By a margin of two to one, students oppose "spend[ing] what is necessary to remain a military superpower" and "us[ing] military force to protect access to oil and other key resources."

Students expressed these views at the conclusion of their participation in the Capitol Forum on America's Future, a program that engages high school social studies students in discussion of our nation's role in a changing international environment. Students from 143 high school classes in seven states completed a series of lessons exploring key issues in international relations. Between March 5 and April 23, 2004, five hundred student representatives and their teachers met at their respective state capitols to deliberate on these issues with their peers and to present their concerns to state and Congressional officials. Following the forum, student representatives returned to their schools to lead their fellow classmates in further discussion. Approximately 2,800 students participated. As a culminating activity, 1,584 students submitted online ballots expressing their concerns, priorities, and vision for our nation's future. That all 2004 forums at state capitols and post-forum balloting took place during a period of increasingly difficult post-war fighting in



Meeting in the House Chamber in Springfield, Illinois, a student explains how one of the "Futures" would impact global issues such as trade, the environment, immigration, or responding to terrorism.

I feel more confident about my opinions now, and I've realized that they do matter, and they do make a difference.

— Student, Whitney Young High School, Chicago, Illinois



Illinois students gathered the night before their Fifth Annual Capitol Forum to view excerpts from *The Fog of War*, a new documentary film examining war and peace in the 20th century through the lens of the life of Robert McNamara, and then discussed its implications for 21st century foreign policy.



Students at the First Maryland Capitol Forum view posters developed by students in participating schools. Each class participating in the Capitol Forum creates a poster expressing its collective views and concerns on international issues.

I see issues differently now and with more understanding.

—Student, Burrillville High School, RI



In a breakout session at the Seventh Annual Connecticut Capitol Forum, students discuss possible policy alternatives for one of four global issues – immigration, trade, terrorism, or the environment.

Iraq may be significant in understanding the data.

The Capitol Forum program has taken place annually for the past seven years. After deliberating on a range of international issues, the Capitol Forum asks students to grapple with one central question: “What role should the United States play in the changing international environment of the 21st century?” They do so by considering four “Futures,” broad outlines of possible directions for U.S. policy. Almost three out of four (69.2 percent) identify as their first or second choice a Future of international cooperation in which we would “play a leadership role in strengthening the UN’s role in maintaining international security and responding to other global problems.” Nearly three out of five (56.3 percent) select as their first or second choice a Future in which we would “focus our energies on protecting our own security” and “be selective in our involvement in international affairs.” Two out of five (42.3 percent) would support a Future calling for the U.S. to “sharply scale back our foreign involvement” recognizing that our “high profile foreign policy programs have only bred resentment against us and made us enemies.”

Most students in all seven states are not supportive now of a Future that calls for us to “pressure other governments to adopt American democratic principles.” This Future was placed at the end of the list by more than two in five participating students (40.7 percent) and ranked first or second by less than a third (30.2 percent). This is a significant change from a year ago when more than half (51.9 percent) supported a similar Future. The lack of support for this Future is consistent with the significant decrease in support for a belief that, “as Americans, we have a responsibility to spread democracy around the world” (down from 36.6 percent in 2003 to 27.3 percent in 2004), and opposition to “spend[ing] what is necessary to remain a military superpower” (down from 33.9 percent in 2003 to 26.8 percent in 2004).

Concern about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has remained consistently high throughout the seven year period that the Capitol Forum has been taking place. Almost fifty percent of students selected this as one of their top three concerns each year (47.1 percent in 2004).

Students have consistently identified concern for the environment and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction among their top concerns each year since 1998. However, over the past three years the overall percentage of students identifying the environment as one of their top concerns has dropped from one in two to one in three (31.3 percent in 2004). Also among the top three concerns in 2004 was the potential to drain resources trying to solve other countries’ problems (34.5 percent). (Students select their top three concerns from a list of twelve to fourteen annually.)

Although fewer students have expressed concern for the environment in recent years, two out of three students



Students in Nebraska and Utah discuss global issues in their morning breakout sessions.

29.7 percent oppose). These numbers, however, are up significantly up from a year ago when only six percent more supported than opposed this position (38.7 percent support, 32.9 percent oppose). Though still a lot, fewer students are now undecided on this issue (24.9 percent compared to 28.5 percent a year ago). Over the previous six years of the Capitol Forum, students have expressed a strong belief in the importance of international cooperation, yet demonstrated ambivalence about the form that it should take. It appears that this is beginning to change.

In 2004, five out of six students expressing a view believe that “our resources should be focused on addressing



Indiana students discuss the policy implications of alternative Futures during the Second Annual Indiana Capitol Forum.

expressing a view support a statement that “The U.S. should help negotiate strict international standards to address global warming and other environmental threats” (50.3 percent support; 25.8 percent oppose). This policy has been ranked high consistently since the Capitol Forum began in 1998. A similar number support a statement that “The U.S. should commit itself to the elimination of nuclear weapons” (50.6 percent support; 26.1 percent oppose).

Capitol Forum gives students the opportunity to develop, share and reevaluate their opinions on substantial global issues. Each year I am impressed with the students’ presentations, and I enjoy learning what Rhode Island’s young adults have to say about the important issues of the day.

— Senator Jack Reed, Rhode Island

Despite students’ strong belief in the need to work cooperatively with the international community to address serious problems (69.8 percent), support that has been consistent throughout the seven-year period, only three in five taking a position believe we should “broaden the mandate of the UN and other international organizations” (42.8 percent support,

66.9 percent). While support has dropped slightly since 2003, this continues to be significantly higher than a few years ago (52.8 percent in 2001 and 53.6 percent in 2000). Fewer than fifteen percent (12.9 percent) disagree with this statement. Analysis of other parts of the ballot suggests that this does not necessarily reflect a significant shift toward addressing domestic over international policy issues. One of two factors may account for this shift. 1) Although the list of “problems at home” did not include terrorism, in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, this is assumed by many. 2) The pressure placed on domestic programs by military spending is taking its toll.

A breakdown of data by state is available on the Capitol Forum web site: www.choices.edu/capitol_forum.

2004-05 CAPITOL FORUM ON AMERICA’S FUTURE

The Capitol Forum on America’s Future is planned in Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Utah, and Washington in 2004-05. Additional states are considering the program. Information on all Capitol Forum programs is available on the program web site at www.choices.edu/capitol_forum.

For additional information about this program, contact the national office:

Choices for the 21st Century Education Program
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THE TOPIC OF THE CAPITOL FORUM

The first years of the 21st century have been tumultuous. As Americans we are rethinking our role in the world. The Capitol Forum engages high school students in consideration of our nation's future at this demanding moment in history. To lay the foundation for student debate on the U.S. role in international affairs, the Capitol Forum highlighted four distinct themes—immigration, trade, environment, and terrorism. Participating teachers introduced these themes within the context of their courses prior to the Forum. At the heart of the Capitol Forum is an exploration of four distinct visions for the United States in the coming years.

THE FUTURES

FUTURE 1: LEAD THE WORLD TO DEMOCRACY The United States is the most powerful nation in the world. The world depends on us to maintain peace and order and to support liberal democratic principles. Today's international system was built around American ideals and power. Neither collective security nor the United Nations can be counted on to deal with the threats to this system. We must devote the necessary resources to build an international moral order and a vigorous international economy grounded in American political and economic principles and we must protect this international system from any threats, even if pressuring other governments to adopt American democratic principles may spark international criticism that the United States is ushering in a "Pax Americana."

FUTURE 2: PROTECT U.S. GLOBAL INTERESTS We live in a dangerously unstable world. U.S. foreign policy must strive for order and security. International terrorism, chaos in the Middle East, rising poverty in the developing world, and global economic competition have created an international minefield for U.S. leaders. We need to focus our energies on protecting our own security, cultivating our key trade relationships, ensuring our access to crucial raw materials, and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons to unfriendly nations or to terrorist networks. We must be selective in our involvement in international affairs and be prepared to protect ourselves—at home and abroad—against any threats to our security and prosperity, even if this policy may breed resentment and lead to an angry backlash against us.

FUTURE 3: BUILD A MORE COOPERATIVE WORLD We live today in an interdependent and interconnected world. We cannot stand alone. National boundaries can no longer halt the spread of AIDS, international drug trafficking, terrorism, and other global scourges. We must take the initiative to bring the nations of the world together and play a leadership role in strengthening the UN's role in maintaining international security and responding to other global problems such as environmental pollution, financial crises, refugees, and AIDS. We must be willing to give up a portion of our independent authority, or sovereignty, to the UN and offer our military, intelligence, and economic support to UN-led initiatives, even if this may limit our ability to use military force unilaterally outside of North America.

FUTURE 4: PROTECT THE U.S. HOMELAND The attacks of September 11, 2001 have made us feel a vulnerability not felt in more than fifty years. We have spent hundreds of billions of dollars a year defending our allies in Western Europe and East Asia and distributed tens of billions more in foreign aid to countries throughout the developing world. These high-profile foreign policy programs have only bred resentment against us and made us enemies. It is time to sharply scale back our foreign involvement and turn our attention to the real threats facing Americans: a sagging economy, decaying schools, a shaky health care system, and inadequate resources to protect against terrorism, even if this may upset the worldwide balance of power and cause insecure countries to seek nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons

WHAT MOST CONCERNS YOU?

- Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons will proliferate and end up in the hands of terrorists..... 47.1%
- The United States will drain its resources trying to solve other countries' problems..... 34.5%
- Damage to the global environment will become irreparable..... 31.3%
- U.S. jobs will be lost to other countries..... 26.3%
- More Americans will die at the hands of terrorists... 26.1%
- A clash of ideologies and political values will fuel conflict and instability in the world..... 24.5%
- The United States will act unilaterally and the international community will turn against us..... 23.6%
- The United States will lose access to oil and other key resources abroad..... 17.6%
- Loose border controls will threaten our security..... 17.4%
- U.S. troops will get bogged down in conflicts abroad..... 16.5%
- Increasing immigration will worsen strains in our society..... 16.4%
- The gulf between the developed and developing worlds will widen, making it increasingly difficult to address common problems..... 13.3%
- Participation in international organizations will force the United States to follow costly or risky policies.... 9.8%

RANKING THE FUTURES

	F1	F2	F3	F4
1st	10.4%	22.0%	46.9%	19.4%
2nd	19.8%	34.3%	22.3%	22.9%
1st/2nd	30.2%	56.3%	69.2%	42.3%
Last	40.7%	13.1%	11.4%	30.0%

RANKING FUTURES—STATE RESULTS

	F1	F2	F3	F4
Connecticut	25.0%	66.6%	45.8%	58.4%
Illinois	27.3%	58.7%	72.8%	41.6%
Indiana	27.3%	60.4%	84.9%	25.5%
Maryland	27.9%	39.5%	69.0%	45.8%
Nebraska	36.2%	52.9%	67.8%	44.3%
Rhode Island	32.8%	56.8%	62.3%	47.3%
Utah	35.3%	58.7%	60.2%	39.1%

Data in this report is based on 1,584 completed student ballots. For more complete data, see www.choices.edu/capitol_forum.

WHAT BELIEFS DRIVE YOUR THINKING?	<i>strongly support</i>	<i>support</i>	<i>SS/S</i>	<i>oppose</i>	<i>strongly oppose</i>	<i>undecided</i>
• In today's interconnected world, many serious problems can be addressed only through international cooperation.	22.0%	47.8%	(69.8%)	8.1%	1.7%	17.7%
• Our resources should be focused on addressing poverty, crime, and budget deficits at home.	19.8%	47.1%	(66.9%)	10.9%	2.0%	17.6%
• The United States should not do business with countries that grossly abuse the human rights of their citizens.	20.5%	41.4%	(61.9%)	11.7%	3.9%	20.0%
• We have no right to decide on our own to pressure another country to behave in a certain way.	19.8%	33.6%	(53.4%)	19.4%	6.7%	17.9%
• Using our economic and military power around the world creates more enemies than friends.	15.3%	37.1%	(52.4%)	19.5%	5.1%	20.4%
• Free trade and open economies are the best way to foster economic growth at home and around the world.	13.7%	37.5%	(51.2%)	12.5%	4.0%	29.7%
• The greatest threat to our civil liberties comes from the limits we put on ourselves because of our fear of others.	14.3%	33.5%	(47.8%)	19.7%	4.1%	25.8%
• Any nation acting alone has neither the moral authority nor the capacity to right the world's wrongs.	15.9%	31.1%	(47.0%)	22.0%	7.8%	20.6%
• Trying to make deep changes in the way the world works is naive and dangerous.	11.1%	31.1%	(42.2%)	25.6%	9.1%	20.5%
• We will always have to compete with the world's other nations for power.	11.0%	30.9%	(41.9%)	28.5%	7.3%	19.7%
• As Americans, we have a responsibility to spread democracy around the world.	6.2%	21.1%	(27.3%)	31.8%	18.9%	19.5%

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?	<i>strongly support</i>	<i>support</i>	<i>SS/S</i>	<i>oppose</i>	<i>strongly oppose</i>	<i>undecided</i>
• The U.S. should commit itself to the elimination of nuclear weapons, even if this means that we will need to rethink our defense strategy.	15.0%	35.6%	(50.6%)	18.8%	7.3%	20.7%
• The U.S. should help negotiate strict international standards to address global warming and other environmental threats, even if compliance forces Americans to pay more for cars, gasoline, and other products that contribute to pollution.	15.3%	35.0%	(50.3%)	18.6%	7.2%	21.2%
• The U.S. should accept fewer immigrants in addition to cracking down on illegal immigration, even if this deprives the American work force of the talent and ambitions of newcomers and fuels anti-American sentiments abroad.	15.4%	27.7%	(43.1%)	22.5%	10.9%	20.8%
• The U.S. should support broadening the mandate of the UN and other international organizations, even if this means we are bound by the decisions of this community of nations and cannot act unilaterally except to defend our homeland.	10.4%	32.4%	(42.8%)	20.6%	9.1%	24.9%
• The U.S. should increase financial aid to countries where poverty and despair are creating the breeding grounds of discontent, even if money needs to be diverted from domestic programs.	10.0%	32.1%	(42.1%)	25.9%	9.9%	19.8%
• The U.S. should impose trade sanctions on countries that threaten their neighbors with aggression or contribute to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, even if such sanctions harm U.S. trade relationships.	8.0%	34.0%	(42.0%)	22.1%	6.3%	27.0%
• The U.S. should use its military – alone if necessary – to stop gross human rights violations, even if this may isolate us from our traditional allies or the international community.	10.0%	24.3%	(34.3%)	27.2%	8.8%	27.0%
• The U.S. should use military force to protect access to oil and other key raw materials, even if this places us in opposition to our traditional allies and the international community.	5.8%	21.0%	(26.8%)	38.5%	12.8%	19.2%
• The U.S. should spend what is necessary to remain a military superpower, even if this means having less domestic spending, larger deficits, or higher taxes than we would like.	5.6%	20.4%	(26.0%)	35.2%	20.6%	15.6%

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS IN 2003-04

Connecticut

Berlin High School
Bristol Central High School (3)
Brunnell High School (Bloomfield)
Masuk High School (Monroe)
Metropolitan Learning Ctr (Bloomfield) (2)
Newington High School (2)

Illinois

Amundsen High School (Chicago) (3)
Bureau Valley High School (Manlius)
El Cuarto Ano Academy (Chicago)
Eureka High School
Geneva High School (3)
Greenville High School (2)
Hinsdale South High School (Darien) (2)
Homewood-Flossmoor HS (Flossmoor)
Joliet West High School
Judah Christian School (Champaign)
Lane Tech College Prep HS (Chicago) (5)
The Latin School (Chicago) (4)
Maine South High Sch (Park Ridge) (3)
New Approach School (Vandalia)
Newark High School (2)
Normal Community High School (3)
Normal Community West High School
Pawnee High School
ROE#46 ESP Alternative School
(Jacksonville)
Saint Scholastica Academy (Chicago)
Siue-E. St. Louis Charter Sch (E. St. Louis)
Streamwood High School (2)
University High School (Normal)
Whitney Young Magnet HS (Chicago) (2)

Indiana

Columbus East High School (2)
Hamilton Southeastern HS (Fishers)
Hauser Jr/Sr High School (Hope)
Loogootee High School (2)
North Daviess High School (Elnora) (2)
Signature School (Evansville)
Wabash High School (4)

Maryland

Carver Center for Arts & Technology
(Baltimore County) (2)
Frederick Douglass High School
(Prince Georges County)
Largo High School (Prince Georges County)
Randallstown High School
(Baltimore County) (4)
Saints Peter & Paul High School (Talbot
County)
Sherwood High School
(Montgomery County) (3)
Wheaton High School (Montgomery County) (2)

Nebraska

Bellevue West High School
Brownell-Talbot High School (Omaha)
Burke High School (Omaha)
Chadron High School
Crawford High School
Duchesne Academy (Omaha)
Fremont High School
Hastings High School (2)
Holdredge High School
Lincoln High School
Mercy High School (Omaha)

Nebraska (continued)

Millard West High School (Omaha) (3)
North Platte High School
Pawnee City High School
Sumner-Eddyville-Miller High School
(Sumner)
Valentine Rural High School
Wausa High School
Wilcox-Hildreth Public School (Wilcox)

Rhode Island

Burrillville High School (2)
Classical High School (Providence) (3)
East Greenwich High School (2)
Eagle Hill School, MA (2)
Lincoln High School (2)
Middletown High School (2)
Moses Brown School (Providence)
Narragansett High School (5)
North Kingstown High School
North Smithfield High School (2)
Portsmouth High School
South Kingstown High School (2)
Toll Gate High School (Warwick) (2)
Warwick Veterans High School

Utah

Beaver High School (2)
Bountiful High School
Christian Heritage (Riverdale) (4)
Clearfield High School
Davis High School (Kaysville)
Granite High School (Salt Lake City)
Lone Peak High School (Highland)
Rowland Hall-St. Mark's (Salt Lake City)

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