

CAPITOL FORUM BALLOT RESULTS – 2009

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. At the heart of the Capitol Forum is an exploration of four distinct visions for the United States in the coming years.

THE FOUR 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

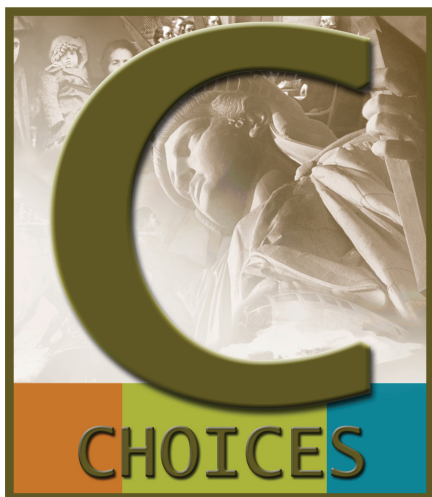
We live in a dangerously unstable world. U.S. foreign policy must strive for order and security. International terrorism, chaos in the Middle East, rising poverty in the developing world, and global economic competition have created an international minefield for U.S. leaders. We need to focus our energies 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.



RANKING THE FUTURES

	FUTURE 1	FUTURE 2	FUTURE 3	FUTURE 4
1st	17%	25%	32%	22%
2nd	29%	36%	24%	28%
1st/2nd	46%	61%	56%	50%
Last	27%	12%	20%	25%

[Data is based on 1,834 completed student ballots.]

STATE VIEWS

Students in Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Washington submitted ballots in the 2009 Capitol Forum. Complete reports on student views by state are available on the Choices web site at <http://www.choices.edu/cf/ballot.php>.

WHAT MOST CONCERNS YOU?

- Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons will proliferate and end up in the hands of terrorists42%
- Damage to the global environment will become irreparable40%
- U.S. jobs will be lost to other countries40%
- The United States will drain its resources trying to solve other countries' problems35%
- A clash of ideologies and political values will fuel conflict and instability in the world30%
- The United States will lose access to oil and other key resources abroad.....21%
- Increasing immigration will worsen strains in our society19%
- The United States will act unilaterally and the international community will turn against us.....18%
- Loose border controls will threaten our security17%
- U.S. troops will get bogged down in conflicts abroad17%
- More Americans will die at the hands of terrorists17%
- The gulf between the developed and developing worlds will widen, making it increasingly difficult to address common problems16%
- Participation in international organizations will force the United States to follow costly or risky policies13%

WHAT BELIEFS DRIVE YOUR THINKING?

	<i>strongly agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>(SA/A)</i>	<i>oppose</i>	<i>strongly oppose</i>	<i>undecided</i>
• Our resources should be focused on addressing poverty, crime, and budget deficits at home.	25%	46%	(71%)	7%	2%	20%
• In today's interconnected world, many serious problems can be addressed only through international cooperation.	22%	49%	(71%)	7%	1%	20%
• The United States should not do business with countries that grossly abuse the human rights of their citizens.	26%	37%	(63%)	13%	3%	21%
• We will always have to compete with the world's other nations for power.	16%	45%	(61%)	15%	5%	19%
• Free trade and open economies are the best way to foster economic growth at home and around the world.	19%	41%	(60%)	6%	3%	31%
• We have no right to decide on our own to pressure another country to behave in a certain way.	20%	37%	(57%)	19%	4%	20%
• Using our economic and military power around the world creates more enemies than friends.	18%	37%	(55%)	17%	5%	23%
• Any nation acting alone has neither the moral authority nor the capacity to right the world's wrongs.	17%	30%	(47%)	19%	5%	29%
• The greatest threat to our civil liberties comes from the limits we put on ourselves because of our fear of others.	14%	33%	(47%)	16%	4%	33%
• Trying to make deep changes in the way the world works is naive and dangerous.	12%	30%	(42%)	26%	6%	26%
• As Americans, we have a responsibility to spread democracy around the world.	9%	24%	(33%)	25%	14%	28%

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

	<i>strongly agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>(SA/A)</i>	<i>oppose</i>	<i>strongly oppose</i>	<i>undecided</i>
• 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.	21%	31%	(52%)	15%	8%	25%
• 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.	17%	30%	(47%)	21%	7%	25%
• 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.	14%	32%	(46%)	21%	7%	26%
• 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.	9%	35%	(44%)	18%	4%	34%
• 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.	11%	29%	(40%)	19%	6%	35%
• 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.	9%	29%	(38%)	24%	9%	29%
• 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.	7%	31%	(38%)	19%	8%	35%
• 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.	8%	21%	(29%)	33%	16%	21%
• 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.	6%	20%	(26%)	38%	10%	26%