

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.

THE FOUR FUTURES

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

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..... 51%
- Damage to the global environment will become irreparable..... 44%
- The United States will drain its resources trying to solve other countries' problems..... 31%
- More Americans will die at the hands of terrorists... 29%
- A clash of ideologies and political values will fuel conflict and instability in the world..... 27%
- Loose border controls will threaten our security..... 23%
- Increasing immigration will worsen strains in our society..... 21%
- U.S. jobs will be lost to other countries..... 21%
- U.S. troops will get bogged down in conflicts abroad..... 20%
- The United States will lose access to oil and other key resources abroad..... 16%
- The United States will act unilaterally and the international community will turn against us..... 15%
- Participation in international organizations will force the United States to follow costly or risky policies.... 14%
- The gulf between the developed and developing worlds will widen, making it increasingly difficult to address common problems..... 11%

RANKING THE FUTURES

	F1	F2	F3	F4
1st	15.4%	24.7%	19.8%	40.1%
2nd	25.8%	32.0%	27.1%	15.1%
1st/2nd	41.2%	56.7%	46.9%	55.2%
Last	30.1%	25.8%	25.8%	18.3%

[Data is based on 249 completed student ballots in New Jersey.]

NATIONAL VIEWS

Students in Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Washington, and West Virginia submitted ballots in the 2007 Capitol Forum. A complete report on student views will be available from the national office. To request a copy, contact:

Choices for the 21st Century Education Program
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The full report will be available in June 2007 on the Choices web site at www.choices.edu/cf/ballot.php.

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>
• The United States should not do business with countries that grossly abuse the human rights of their citizens.	43%	42%	(85%)	11%	3%	12%
• Our resources should be focused on addressing poverty, crime, and budget deficits at home.	32%	53%	(85%)	12%	2%	9%
• In today's interconnected world, many serious problems can be addressed only through international cooperation.	23%	61%	(84%)	13%	2%	13%
• Using our economic and military power around the world creates more enemies than friends.	17%	57%	(74%)	21%	5%	16%
• We have no right to decide on our own to pressure another country to behave in a certain way.	28%	43%	(71%)	18%	11%	12%
• Free trade and open economies are the best way to foster economic growth at home and around the world.	21%	48%	(69%)	25%	5%	41%
• The greatest threat to our civil liberties comes from the limits we put on ourselves because of our fear of others.	18%	50%	(68%)	26%	7%	23%
• We will always have to compete with the world's other nations for power.	19%	42%	(61%)	30%	9%	21%
• Any nation acting alone has neither the moral authority nor the capacity to right the world's wrongs.	23%	35%	(58%)	33%	9%	22%
• Trying to make deep changes in the way the world works is naive and dangerous.	16%	41%	(57%)	34%	9%	15%
• As Americans, we have a responsibility to spread democracy around the world.	10%	29%	(39%)	40%	21%	21%

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 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.	32%	44%	(76%)	19%	5%	17%
• 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.	11%	51%	(62%)	29%	9%	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.	25%	33%	(58%)	28%	14%	18%
• 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.	13%	45%	(58%)	27%	14%	19%
• 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%	41%	(56%)	29%	15%	19%
• 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%	46%	(56%)	31%	13%	22%
• 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.	18%	35%	(53%)	39%	8%	25%
• 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.	9%	36%	(45%)	40%	16%	23%
• 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.	12%	21%	(33%)	43%	25%	11%