



The Capitol Forum on America's Future

2003 BALLOT REPORT

Students worry about nuclear proliferation, support international cooperation

In programming taking place during the U.S. led war with Iraq, students in six 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, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and Utah place the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons on the top of their list of concerns. More than one in two (54.5 percent) select the statement that "nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons will proliferate" as one of their three top concerns out of a list of fourteen. A third of those participating worry that "the United States will drain its resources trying to solve other countries' problems (33.5 percent)." Almost as many are concerned that "damage to the global environment will become irreparable" (30.8 percent), "more Americans will die at the hands of terrorists" (28.9 percent) or "a clash of ideologies and political values will fuel conflict and instability in the world" (28.3 percent). By a margin of more than four to one, students express strong belief in the need to work cooperatively with the international community (76.4 percent support or strongly support, while only 11.5 percent oppose).



Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-NE) talks with students at the Fifth Annual Nebraska Capitol Forum. U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige and Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale look on.



Meeting in the House Chamber in Springfield, Illinois, a student explains how certain U.S. policies would impact global issues such as trade, conflict, immigration, and the environment.

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 76 high school classes in six states completed a series of lessons exploring key issues in international relations. Between March 21 and April 18, 2003, four 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. As a culminating activity, 1,476 students submitted a ballot expressing their concerns, priorities, and vision for our nation's future. That all 2003 forums at state capitols and post-forum balloting took place after the outbreak of war with Iraq on March 17 may be significant in understanding the data.

The Capitol Forum program has taken place annually for the past

The Capitol Forum impacted me as a student, citizen and voter by making me more aware of the voice I have in society.

— Student, Carmel High School, Mundelein, Illinois



Indiana students participate in warm-up activities focused on international issues on the evening before their First Capitol Forum at the state capitol in Indianapolis.



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

I'm really proud that my school took part today. I think it says a lot that schools will offer this and want to promote more political efficacy among students.

—Student, Hamilton Southeastern High School
Fishers, Indiana



Students participate in an activity exploring international trade issues in a breakout session at the Fourth Annual Rhode Island Capitol Forum.

six years. Concern about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has remained consistently high throughout the six year period with approximately fifty percent of students (54.5 percent in 2003) selecting this as one of their top three concerns each year. (Until 2002, students selected their top three concerns from a list of twelve. For the past two years they have selected from a list of fourteen.) Similar to 2002, one in three (28.9 percent) identified a concern, that “more Americans will die at the hands of terrorists” as one of their top three.

What has changed is the priority given to environmental concerns and student views on immigration. A majority of students identified concern for the environment as one of their top concerns in 1998-2001. Over the past two years this has dropped to one in three (30.8 percent in 2003). Student support for a policy that calls for “accept[ing] fewer immigrants in addition to cracking down on illegal immigration” decreased significantly this year (40.5 percent compared to 48.5 percent in 2001 and a high of 55.6 percent in 1998).

Despite these differences, there are also many striking similarities with previous years’ results. Student support continues to be strong for “help[ing to] negotiate strict international standards to address global warming and other environmental threats” (58.7 percent support or strongly support while only 24.9 percent oppose). This policy has consistently received top billing since the Capitol Forum began in 1998. Student support has grown slightly this year for policies to “impose trade sanctions on countries that threaten their neighbors” (55.5 percent support and 26.3 percent oppose) and to “lead international military missions to stop gross human rights violations” (54.6 percent support and 26.2 percent oppose). A strong majority of students continues to feel that our nation “should not be doing business with countries that grossly abuse the human rights of their citizens” (66.3 percent).

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 (76.4 percent), support that has been consistent throughout the six-year period, only two in five (38.7 percent) believe we should “broaden the mandate of the UN and other international organizations.” More than one in four students (28.5 per-



Students at the Second Annual Utah Capitol Forum confer in the hallway outside the House Chamber before their hearing on the future direction of U.S. foreign policy.

to our shores. One explanation may be that, although the list of “problems at home” did not include terrorism, this is assumed by many. A second is that the pressure placed on domestic programs by military spending is taking its toll.

The Capitol Forum asks students to grapple with one central question: “What role should we 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. Students have consistently shown their strongest support for two of the four. However, the order has switch this year for the first time. Two in three (65.5 percent) select as their first or second choice a Future in which we would “strive for order and security,” shaping our relations with other countries to “serve our economic and security needs.” Almost as many (59.1 percent) identify as their first or second choice a Future of international cooperation in which we would “increase our financial support for the UN and spearhead joint efforts to address economic, social, and environmental problems around the world.” A Future calling for the U.S. to recognize a “special responsibility to stop the world’s bullies and promote an international standard for human rights” continues to draw less support from students (51.9 percent). Most students in all six states continue



Students at the First Indiana Capitol Forum prepare to advocate for one of four “Futures” that describe broad frameworks for U.S. policy direction.

cent) were undecided. These findings are similar to those of previous years. It appears that while students believe strongly in the importance of international cooperation, they continue to be ambivalent about the form that it should take.

In 2003 as in 2002, three out of four students expressed a strong belief that “our resources should be focused on addressing problems at home, such as poverty, crime, and budget deficits” (75.0 percent support or strongly support). This is significantly higher than in previous years (52.8 percent in 2001 and 53.6 percent in 2000). Fewer than fifteen percent (13.9 percent) disagree with this statement. Analysis of other parts of the ballot suggests that this does not reflect a significant shift toward addressing domestic over international policy issues, but rather a recognition that, in the wake of September 11, international concerns have come home

to be unresponsive of a Future that calls for the U.S. to “gradually phase out our alliances outside North America, sharply reduce our military spending,” and “focus on social, economic, and security needs at home.” This Future was placed at the end of the list by more than half of participating students (56.5 percent). The lack of support for this Future contrasts sharply with the overwhelming support expressed for a belief that “our resources should be focused on addressing problems at home, such as poverty, crime, and budget deficits” (see above). However, this contrast seems to confirm that students consider terrorism to be among the problems at home that require our attention and resources.

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

2003-04 CAPITOL FORUM ON AMERICA’S FUTURE

The Capitol Forum on America’s Future is planned in Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and Utah in 2003-04. 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
Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, Box 1948, Providence, RI 02912
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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 a foundation for student debate on the U.S. role in international affairs, the Capitol Forum highlighted four distinct themes—immigration, trade, environment, and conflict. Participating teachers introduced these themes within the context of their courses prior to the Forum. Understanding these themes—their manifestations in history and implications for present day international politics—prepared students for their part in the Capitol Forum.

THE FUTURES

At the heart of the Capitol Forum is an exploration of four distinct visions — or “futures” — for the United States in the coming years.

FUTURE 1: STAND UP FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS
As the home of freedom and democracy, the United States has a special responsibility to stop the world's bullies and promote an international standard for human rights. To do this, we will need to break our alliances with governments that do not value human rights and democracy and be prepared to use economic sanctions or forced to uphold these principles.

FUTURE 2: CHART A STABLE COURSE In a world that has grown dangerously unstable, we must strive for order and security. Our relations with individual countries should serve our economic and security needs. To do this, we should avoid letting political differences harm our important security and trade relationships. We must maintain a strong military presence abroad but not send U.S. troops into battle unless it is to protect vital U.S. interests.

FUTURE 3: BUILD A MORE COOPERATIVE WORLD In today's interdependent world, we cannot separate our problems from those affecting the world as a whole. As the world's most powerful country, we must be willing to give over a portion of our sovereignty to the UN. We should increase our financial support for the UN and spearhead joint efforts to address economic, security, social, and environmental problems that affect us all. We should work to establish a permanent UN military force, and we should not send U.S. troops to fight abroad without UN Security Council approval.

FUTURE 4: TURN INWARD Having spent billions of dollars during the Cold War to defend and to aid countries around the world, now it is time to focus on social, economic, and security needs at home. To do this, we will need to phase out our alliances outside North America and sharply reduce our military spending overseas. U.S. policy should be driven strictly by American economic and security interests, not by any ideas that we can influence the governments or policies of other countries.

WHAT MOST CONCERNS YOU?

- Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons will proliferate..... 54.5%
- The United States will drain its resources trying to solve other countries' problems..... 33.5%
- Damage to the global environment will become irreparable..... 30.8%
- More Americans will die at the hands of terrorists... 28.9%
- A clash of ideologies and political values will fuel conflict and instability in the world..... 28.3%
- The United States will lose access to oil and other key resources abroad..... 18.2%
- Increasing immigration will worsen strains in our society..... 18.0%
- Loose border controls will threaten our security..... 15.7%
- U.S. troops will get bogged down in conflicts abroad..... 14.7%
- The gulf between the developed and developing worlds will widen, making it increasingly difficult to address common problems..... 13.6%
- U.S. jobs will be lost to other countries..... 13.3%
- The United States will isolate itself from the international community..... 13.1%
- Participation in international organizations will force the United States to follow costly or risky policies.... 10.5%
- Expansion by China or Russia will fuel conflict and instability..... 6.9%

RANKING THE FUTURES

	F1	F2	F3	F4
1st	22.6%	36.9%	29.4%	11.2%
2nd	29.3%	28.6%	29.7%	12.4%
1st/2nd	51.9%	65.5%	59.1%	23.6%
Last	19.0%	9.2%	15.4%	56.5%

RANKING FUTURES—STATE RESULTS

	F1	F2	F3	F4
Connecticut	48.5%	68.2%	70.5%	12.9%
Illinois	52.5%	59.8%	61.9%	25.8%
Indiana	38.8%	67.1%	69.1%	25.0%
Nebraska	57.7%	71.0%	51.5%	19.8%
Utah	68.9%	71.1%	50.0%	10.0%
Rhode Island	45.3%	67.5%	52.4%	34.9%

[Students are considered supporters if they ranked a Future 1st or 2nd.]

Data in this report is based on 1,476 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.	23.4%	53.0%	(76.4%)	9.5%	2.0%	12.1%
• Our resources should be focused on addressing problems at home, such as poverty, crime, and budget deficits.	25.8%	49.2%	(75.0%)	11.3%	2.6%	11.2%
• The United States should not do business with countries that grossly abuse the human rights of their citizens.	26.5%	39.8%	(66.3%)	14.8%	3.9%	15.1%
• Free trade and open economies are the best way to foster economic growth.	17.3%	43.1%	(60.4%)	10.9%	3.3%	25.4%
• We have no right to decide on our own to pressure another country to behave in a certain way.	17.7%	32.8%	(50.5%)	27.6%	7.6%	14.4%
• Using our economic and military power around the world creates more enemies than friends.	14.4%	33.3%	(47.7%)	26.9%	6.5%	18.9%
• We will always have to compete with the world's other nations for power.	11.3%	33.7%	(45.0%)	32.9%	8.3%	13.7%
• Trying to make deep changes in the way the world works is naive and dangerous.	10.4%	31.7%	(42.1%)	30.8%	9.8%	17.3%
• As Americans, we have a responsibility to spread democracy around the world.	9.1%	27.5%	(36.6%)	34.1%	11.0%	18.4%
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.	19.8%	38.9%	(58.7%)	18.2%	6.7%	16.5%
• 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 relations.	12.2%	43.3%	(55.5%)	20.2%	6.1%	18.2%
• The U.S. should lead international military missions to stop gross human rights violations, even if this may involve U.S. troops in protracted conflicts.	14.6%	40.0%	(54.6%)	21.1%	5.1%	19.2%
• The U.S. should increase financial aid to countries that are moving toward democracy and free-market economic systems, even if money needs to be diverted from domestic programs.	9.0%	38.1%	(47.1%)	26.9%	6.7%	19.2%
• 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.	18.2%	22.3%	(40.5%)	27.0%	10.0%	16.5%
• The U.S. should support broadening the mandate of the UN and other international organizations, even if this means we are bound to contribute to efforts that Americans do not fully support.	6.6%	32.1%	(38.7%)	25.8%	7.1%	28.5%
• The U.S. should use military force to protect access to oil and other important raw materials, even if this puts U.S. troops at risk for protracted periods of time.	8.5%	29.4%	(37.9%)	34.0%	12.1%	16.0%
• The U.S. should use its military abroad only as part of a multilateral force, even if this means we are restricted in how we can use our armed forces.	6.8%	31.0%	(37.8%)	25.5%	8.9%	28.8%
• 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.	9.4%	24.5%	(33.9%)	37.7%	15.6%	12.7%
• The U.S. should retaliate against countries with unfair trade practices, even if we jeopardize our overall relations with Japan, France, and other key allies.	3.8%	16.5%	(20.3%)	47.1%	17.0%	15.7%

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS IN 2002-03

CONNECTICUT

Bristol Central High School
Granby Memorial High School
Joel Barlow High School (Redding) I
Joel Barlow High School (Redding) II
Metropolitan Learning Ctr (Bloomfield) I
Metropolitan Learning Ctr (Bloomfield) II
Newington High School I
Newington High School II
Rigdefield High School

ILLINOIS

Bureau Valley High School (Manlius)
Carmel High School (Mundelein)
Effingham High School, Effingham
El Cuarto Ano Academy (Chicago)
Eureka High School I
Eureka High School II
Geneva High School
Greenville High School
Hinsdale South High School (Darien)
Homewood-Flossmoor HS (Flossmoor)
Judah Christian School (Champaign)
Kenwood Academy (Chicago) ONE
Kenwood Academy (Chicago) TWO
Lincoln Park High School (Chicago)
Maine South High School (Park Ridge)
Newark High School
Normal Community High School
Normal Community West High School I

ILLINOIS (CONTINUED)

Normal Community West High School II
Pawnee High School
Siue-E. St. Louis Charter Sch (E. St. Louis)
Streamwood High School
The Latin School (Chicago)
Whitney Young Magnet HS (Chicago)

INDIANA

Columbus East High School,
Floyd Central High School (Floyds Knobs)
Hamilton Southeastern HS (Fishers)
Hauser Jr/SR High School (Hope)
McCutcheon High School (Lafayette)
Signature School (Evansville)
Winamac High School

NEBRASKA

Ashland-Greenwood High School
Bellevue West High School
Benson High School (Omaha)
Brownell-Talbot High School (Omaha)
Burke High School (Omaha)
Chadron High School, Chadron
Duchesne Academy (Omaha) I
Duchesne Academy (Omaha) II
Holdrege High School
Lexington High School

NEBRASKA (CONTINUED)

Millard West High School (Omaha) I
Millard West High School (Omaha) II
Wausa High School
Wilcox Public School

RHODE ISLAND

Burrillville High School I
Burrillville High School II
Classical High School (Providence)
Eagle Hill School, MA
East Greenwich High School I
East Greenwich High School II
Johnston High School, Johnston
Lincoln School, Providence
Moses Brown School, Providence
North Kingstown High School I
North Kingstown High School II
North Smithfield High School I
North Smithfield High School II
South Kingstown High School
Warwick Veterans High School

UTAH

Beaver High School
Bountiful High School
Box Elder High School (Brigham City)
Christian Heritage (Riverdale)
Clearfield High School
Navajo Mountain HS (Tonalea, AZ)
North Seveir High School (Salina)

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To bring the Capitol Forum to your state, contact the Choices Education Program (401) 863-3155 • choices@brown.edu
You can visit the Capitol Forum on the web at www.choices.edu/capitol_forum