

# Capitol Forum on America's Future

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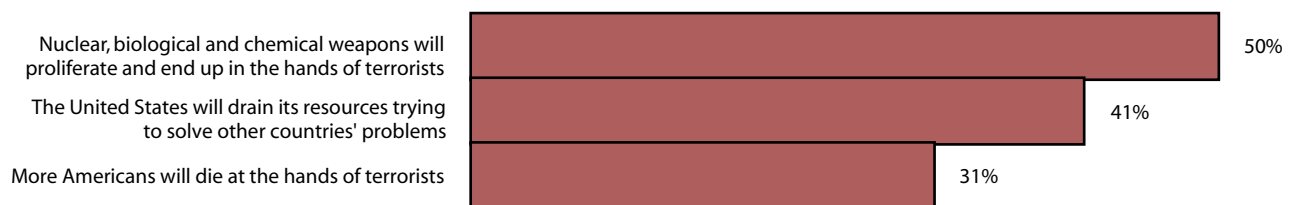
## 2005 Ballot Report—Tomorrow's electorate voices concerns today

In programs taking place in spring 2005, high school students in nine states place proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons at the top of their list of international concerns. Most students support international cooperation as a guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy but also demonstrate concern about problems here at home.

When considering a wide range of international issues in the context of discussing America's role in the world, high school students participating in the 2005 Capitol Forum on America's Future place the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons on the top of their list of concerns. Students in Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington, and West Virginia took part in the program in 2005. Fifty percent of students selected 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. Two out of five (41%) of those participating worry that "the United States will drain its resources trying to solve other countries' problems." This number is significantly higher than a year ago when only 35 percent identified this concern in their top three. Almost one in three (31%) worry that "more Americans will die at the hands of terrorists." Students were considerably less concerned with issues such as border control, increasing immigration, access to oil, or negative aspects of participating in international organizations.

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 150 high school classes in nine states completed a series of lessons exploring key issues in international relations. Between March 11 and April 21, 2005, seven 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, almost 3000 students submitted online ballots expressing their concerns, priorities, and vision for our nation's future. The Capitol Forum program has taken place annually for the past eight years.

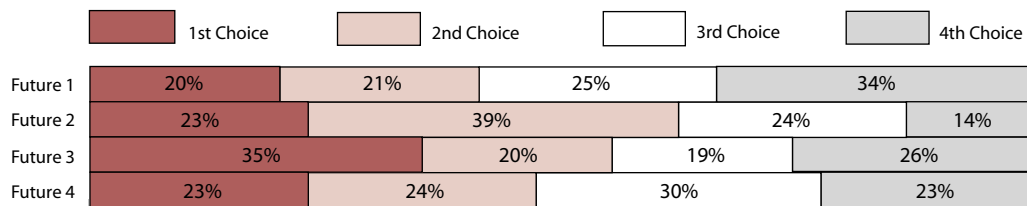
### TOP CONCERNS (FROM LIST OF 13)



## FOUR FUTURES: CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVE POLICY DIRECTIONS

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?” A framework of four divergent policy directions—or Futures—form the core of student deliberations. Among the four Futures, “Future 3: Build a More Cooperative World” received significantly more support as a first choice than any other Future. Of almost 3,000 students who participated in the online ballot, more than a third (35%) identified Future 3 as their first choice. However, when considering first and second choices as positive responses, three out of five students (62%) registered positive responses to “Future 2: Protect U.S. Global Interests.” Although many students (seven out of eight) express a belief that “our resources should be focused on addressing poverty, crime, and budget deficits at home,” this does not translate into support of a Future that places domestic priorities in the context of a foreign policy characterized by disengagement. “Future 4: Protect the U.S. Homeland” is viewed favorably by only 47 percent of students. The least supported Future was “Future 1: Lead the World to Democracy” which was ranked first by only 20 percent and placed last by 34 percent.

### FUTURES RANKINGS



More than twice as many students support as oppose a policy that calls for the U.S. to “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.” (53% support or strongly support this statement, 25% oppose it.) By an equal margin students oppose “spend[ing] what is necessary to remain a military superpower” (26% support or strongly support this statement, 54% oppose it.)

Concern about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has remained consistently high throughout the eight years that the Capitol Forum has been taking place. Nearly fifty percent of students have selected this as one of their top three concerns each year. This was also true of a nationwide sampling of students (8,225) who participated in study and deliberation on these issues between March 2004 and January 2005.

A report on the data collected from students during the 2005 Capitol Forum program is available online at [www.choices.edu/capitol\\_forum/capf\\_ballot\\_repts.cfm](http://www.choices.edu/capitol_forum/capf_ballot_repts.cfm).

I never thought adults cared about what kids said until the discussions at the Forum.

—Student, Chicago, Illinois



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

### About the Capitol Forum on America’s Future

The Capitol Forum engages high school students in consideration of our nation’s future at a demanding moment in history. To lay the foundation for student deliberation on the U.S. role in international affairs, the 2005 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.



Students at the First Maine Capitol Forum present their views on four alternative Futures for U.S. policy in the world.



Students in Maryland discuss their views on global issues with peers at their state capitol.

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

### THE FUTURES IN BRIEF

**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, but we must 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.

*The Futures are available in full from the Choices Program web site at <[www.choices.edu/USrole.cfm](http://www.choices.edu/USrole.cfm)> and in the Choices curriculum unit, *The U.S. Role in a Changing World*. The Futures are designed to help students think about a range of possible policy directions. Each Future includes a set of policies on specific issues, an overview of the beliefs that underlie it, some arguments in support of the position, and some criticisms of it. After analysis of the four Futures and deliberation with their peers, students are expected to frame their own "Future Five" reflecting their views on the topic.*

# PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS IN 2004-05

## Illinois

Amundsen High School (Chicago) (4)  
Bureau Valley High School (Manlius)  
El Cuarto Ano Academy (Chicago)  
Elgin Academy (3)  
Eureka High School  
Greenville High School (2)  
Hinsdale South High School (Darien) (2)  
Homewood-Flossmoor HS (Flossmoor) (2)  
Joliet West High School (5)  
Judah Christian School (Champaign)  
Maine South High School (Park Ridge) (3)  
Newark High School (2)  
Normal Community West High School  
Normal High School (2)  
Pawnee High School  
Saint Scholastica Academy (Chicago)  
SIUE-East St. Lois Charter School  
Streamwood High School  
University High School (Normal)

## Indiana

Barr-Reeve High School (Montgomery)  
Cathedral High School (Indianapolis)  
Columbus East High School (5)  
Covenant Christian H S (Indianapolis) (2)  
Harmony School (Bloomington)  
Hauser Jr/Sr High School (Hope) (2)  
Jefferson High School (Lafayette) (2)  
Loogootee High School  
Marian High School (Mishawaka)  
North Daviess High School (Elnora) (3)  
Northwest High School (Kokomo)  
Signature School (Evansville) (4)  
Silver Creek High School (Sellersburg)  
Wabash High School  
Zionsville High School (2)

## PROGRAM SPONSORS

### Illinois

Illinois Humanities Council  
McCormick Tribune Foundation  
Office of Secretary of State Jesse White

### Indiana

Center for International Business Education  
and Research, Indiana University  
Center for the Study of Global Change,  
Indiana University—Bloomington  
Columbus East High School  
Geography Educators' Network of Indiana  
Indiana Council for the Social Studies  
Indiana Department of Education  
Indiana Historical Society  
International Center of Indianapolis

### National Office

The Capitol Forum on America's Future is a program of the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. The Choices Program incorporates cutting-edge scholarship into curriculum resources on a range of current and historical international topics, provides professional development for teachers, and organizes educational programs for students. The Capitol Forum is endorsed by the National Council for the Social Studies (CSS) and the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS), and approved by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). Information on all programs and resources of the Choices Program is available online at <[www.choices.edu](http://www.choices.edu)>.

## Maine

Easton Jr/Sr High School  
Lewiston High School (4)  
Mt. Desert Island High School  
New Gloucester High School (Grav) (4)  
Portland High School  
Watershed Community School (Rockland)  
Wells High School (2)  
Westbrook High School

## Maryland

Broadneck High School (Annapolis) (2)  
Franklin High School (Reistertown) (3)  
Paint Branch High School (Burtonsville)  
Saints Peter & Paul High School (Easton) (2)  
Wheaton High School (Silver Spring) (2)

## Nebraska

Bellevue West High School  
Greenwood High School (Ashland)  
Holdrege High School  
Lincoln High School  
Mercy High School (Omaha)  
Millard West High School (Omaha) (3)  
North Platte High School  
Omaha North High School (2)  
Pawnee City High School  
Plainview High School  
Potter-Dix High School  
Sterling High School (2)  
Sumner-Eddyville-Miller High School  
Valentine Rural High School  
Wausa High School  
Wilcox-Hildreth Public School (Wilcox)

## Maine

KIDS Consortium  
Maine Department of Education  
Office of Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap

## Maryland

Maryland State Department of Education  
Maryland Center for Civic Education

## Nebraska

Office of Secretary of State John Gale  
Governor Dave Heineman  
Nebraska Humanities Council

## Rhode Island

East Greenwich High School  
Moses Brown School (Providence)  
Narragansett High School (5)  
North Kingstown High School  
North Smithfield High School (2)  
Portsmouth High School  
South Kingstown High School (3)  
Textron Chamber of Commerce Academy  
Westerly High School

## Utah

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

## Washington

Cleveland High School (Seattle) (2)  
Clover Park High School (Lakewood)  
Mercer Island High School  
Nathan Hale High School (Seattle) (2)  
River Ridge High School (Lacey)  
Shorewood High School (Shoreline)  
The Bush School (Seattle)

## West Virginia

Moorefield High School (2)  
Parkersburg High School (2)  
Sissonville High School (4)

## Rhode Island

Office of Secretary of State Matt Brown  
Global Rhode Island  
The Pell Center for International Relations and  
Public Policy  
Rhode Island League of Women Voters  
Education Fund  
Rhode Island Department of Education

## Utah

Lt. Governor Gary Herbert  
Utah Humanities Council

## Washington

World Affairs Council of Seattle  
Office of Secretary of State Sam Reed

## West Virginia

Commission on International Education

## THE CHOICES PROGRAM

*Explore the Past... Shape the Future*

*History and Current Issues for the Classroom*