

Congressional Voting Scenarios: Competing interests

Directions

Work in small groups to discuss and develop your responses to these questions for each scenario. Refer to **Handout A: Background Essay—The Nature of Representation in the U.S. Congress** as needed.

- A. List the competing interests: What are the interests of the district? Of the nation? Of the member's political party? The member's own principles?
- B. Explain how you would vote in that situation and why.
- C. Explain whether and in what ways each congressperson is acting as a delegate or as a trustee in making the decision about how to vote.

Scenario 1

A bill has been proposed to increase income taxes by 20%, and cut spending on all government programs by 20%. The district that you represent has made it clear they do not want to pay any more taxes, but they also do not want to see their social security and other government benefits cut. Your political party has also stated that no new taxes should be considered, only cuts in spending and benefits. If no changes are made in taxation and spending, in the next few decades, the U.S. will no longer have enough money to do anything other than pay Social Security, Medicare, and interest on the national debt. How will you vote?

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Scenario 2

The president wants to go to war with a country in the Middle East. He has stated that it will bring stability and democracy to the region and make the U.S. more secure against its enemies. Other military experts have testified that the U.S. may be drawn into a long and difficult conflict. The military base in the district that you represent will play an important role in the war, but will also bear the burden of injuries and deaths the war will bring. Your party is divided on the war, although the opposition party is solidly behind it. Your constituents are in support of the war, but only by a thin margin. How will you vote?

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Scenario 3

The interstate highway that runs through the district that you represent is in need of major repairs. A proposed law would pay for the repairs of the road in your district, as well as roads all over the country, but the money would come from additional borrowing, increasing the U.S. national debt. Both your party and the opposition party are in favor of the bill. How will you vote?

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Scenario 4

In three days, the federal government will run out of money and will have to shut down all non-essential operations. One of the major employers in the district that you represent is a military base, and although it will remain open, some civilian contractors may no longer be paid. The reason the government will run out of money is because Congress and the president cannot agree on a plan for spending. There is a bill proposed that will sidestep the issue, but it will not solve the basic problem that the president and Congress cannot agree on how much to tax and how much to spend. Shutting down the government might create a crisis that will force both Congress and the president to reach a compromise, or it may simply make people angry at you and your political party. Your political party is largely in support of allowing the government to shut down; the opposition party is in favor of sidestepping the issue. Will you allow the government to shut down, or will you vote for the bill to sidestep the issue?

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Scenario 5

The president has proposed building two hundred new and very expensive airplanes as part of the modernization of America's national defense. Military experts in the Department of Defense have said the plane would be helpful, but there might also be other uses for the money. The planes will be built in your congressional district, and will create thousands of new, well-paid jobs in engineering and other technical fields in your district. There is no additional tax money available to pay for the airplanes, so it will require additional borrowing by the federal government. Your political party is against the program as waste of money. The opposition political party is in favor of it. How will you vote?

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