



THE POLICY
CIRCLE®

U.S. House of Representatives

Discussion Guide

Let's review

At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room.

And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so be prepared to hear a different point of view. Listen first, and focus on the facts.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

The "Table-it" Rule: If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

Let's begin

*Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief.*

- Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
- What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief? What matters?

Let's discuss

Pick 2 or 3 questions that resonate with the group and discuss, or choose your own.

- What are some advantages and disadvantages to the structure of the House of Representatives? Do you think the structure and process works?
- Does the House of Representatives fulfill its purpose of being the branch of government that is closest to the American public?
- Do you know who your representative is?
 - How has he/she has voted on a given issue?
 - On which committees/subcommittees as he/she served?
- Is there legislation you are interested in following? How would you go about doing so?
- How could you participate in a committee hearing or the legislative process? Have you done so?

Let's act

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share

- The House is the only institution that has been [directly elected by American voters](#) since its formation in 1789.
- There are [435 representatives in the House](#), and have been since the number was fixed by law in 1911. Each House representative is elected to a two-year term serving the people of a specific congressional district.
- To be elected, [a representative must be](#) at least 25 years old, a United States citizen for at least seven years, and a representative of the state he or she represents.
- [Only the House may originate revenue bills](#), and by tradition it also originates appropriate bills.
- [House Leadership positions include](#) the Speaker of the House, the Majority and Minority Leaders, and the Majority and Minority Whips.
- If a bill passes the House by [simple majority](#), 218 votes of 435 total.

Engage Locally

- *Learn more*
 - **Research your elected representatives.**
 - Your legislators, state comptroller, attorney general and other local elected officials want to know their constituents. Write to them about your interest in elections.
 - Do you know who your representative is? You can find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
 - **Explore the impact of the House of Representatives in your community.**
 - Do you know how to find out how your representatives have voted on a given issue?
 - Use [GovTrack](#) to find legislation that affects you, and see how your representatives have voted.
 - How could you go about contacting your representatives?
 - Find the legislative calendar for the House of Representatives [here](#).
 - [See these tips](#) for step-by-step instructions on how to write letters to elected officials.
- *Reach out*
 - Explore what organizations, legislators, and journalists you could contact to ask questions, learn more and get engaged.
 - If you have trouble finding the information you are looking for on your municipality's website, consider contacting agency or department heads. You can find the contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#).
 - The Policy Circle offers a number of resources for engaging on the local level. Learn how to write a letter to the editor on [The Policy Circle website](#).
 - It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).

Post a Recap/Dive Deeper

- Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- Decide your next meeting topic. Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? This brief is part of the Five for Active Citizenship [Conversation Series](#). Other briefs in these series include:
 - [U.S. Senate](#)
 - [The U.S. Constitution](#)
- Dive Deeper into this area. If this is an area you would like to pursue further consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [developing a message about your issue](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness.