



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 Senate? Do you think the structure and process works?
- Does the Senate fulfill its purpose of being the branch of government that polishes and reworks House legislation?
- Do you know who your Senator 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 Senate has the [unique responsibilities](#) of conducting impeachment trials and providing advice and consent to confirm treaties and executive and judicial nominations.
- Senators have been directly elected by their state's voters since the passage of the [17th Amendment in 1913](#).
- Each state elects two senators, for a grand total of [100 senators](#) in the Senate. Each senator is elected to a six-year term, with one-third expiring every 2 years.
- To be elected, [a Senator must be](#) at least 30 years old, a United States citizen for at least nine years, and a resident of the state he or she represents.
- [Senate leadership positions include](#) the Majority and Minority Leaders, and the Majority and Minority Whips.
- The Senate refers roughly [3,000 bills and resolutions](#) to committees during each two-year congressional session, but only about 500 of these are reported back to the full Senate.

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 Senate 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 Senate [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. House of Representatives](#)
 - [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.