Debate and Discussion: Climate and Energy Policy Pre-Visit Lesson Introduction

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During this pre-visit lesson, students will get the chance to read or watch a pro and con speech about real legislation (the Green New Deal) being discussed in the United States Senate, the legislation discussed in the pro con speeches relates directly to the environmental legislation students will be working with during the SIM. Students will summarize the speeches, consider their arguments, and use them to enhance their own knowledge of environmental policy. Students will then participate in their own discussion on environmental policy to demonstrate their understanding and prepare for their visit to the Edward M. Kennedy Institute.

- **Lesson Duration:** 50 minutes

Lesson Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will be able to:

- Analyze and describe opposing views on a political policy
- Draw conclusions on how climate policy impacts American citizens the nation as a whole

Essential Questions

- What is the best policy for the United States to address climate change?
- What are the pros and cons to different climate policies?
- What aspects of climate policy are appealing to both political parties?

Enduring Understandings

- Senators must take into account their own personal beliefs as well as those of their party and constituents when voting in Congress.
- Conflict resolution involves compromise, cooperation, and change.
- There is constant debate over the proper role of the government.

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Pre-Visit Lesson Plan

- **TOTAL TIME:** 50 minutes

ACTIVITY	TIME	DESCRIPTION
Do Now	**5-10 min**	As students enter the classroom, direct them to sit at their assigned seats. Once students are seated, instruct them to answer the do now questions to begin considering the debate over climate change policy. Once students have had time to answer the do now questions, call on 2-3 students to share their answers with the class. Do Now Questions: 1. In your opinion, how urgent an issue is climate change? Explain your answer. 2. In your opinion, should a solution to climate change purely focus on environmental issues, or also address social issues (housing, wages, jobs, etc)? Explain your answer. 3. (optional) If you were in charge of our government, how would you deal with climate change? Sample Answers: 1. Example: Climate change is an urgent issue because it is already impacting the country with an increase in extreme weather events like hurricanes, extreme cold, and extreme heat. 2. Example: A solution to climate change must also focus on social issues like jobs because many workers currently earn a living in

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		industries like coal or natural gas, and those fossil fuel jobs may change or disappear entirely as we address climate change. 3. Example: If I was in charge of the U.S. government I would place a high tax on fossil fuel companies that contribute to climate change and use that money to fund green energy initiatives.
Intro Video: Green New Deal	**5-10 min**	Tell students that during class today they will be analyzing a debate on a policy proposal from the United States Senate, the Green New Deal, which is an outline for how the United States can address the environmental and social impacts of climate change. Explain that this proposal is similar to the climate legislation your students will be working with during the Senate Immersion module at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute. Play this short video below to introduce students to the Green New Deal: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsCK-5K_Mfo After watching the video, ask students if they have any questions. Once you have cleared up any confusion have students turn to a shoulder partner and discuss the following questions: 1. How would the Green New Deal address Climate Change? 2. What arguments are made against the Green New Deal? 3. (optional) What is **your** opinion on the Green New Deal? After students have had a chance to discuss the video with a shoulder

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		partner, call on 3-4 volunteers to share their opinion with the class.
Pro/Con Speeches	**5 min (video version)** **10 min (written version)**	Tell students that they will now examine real speeches delivered on the Senate floor regarding the Green New Deal. They will consider a pro speech that is in favor of the resolution and a con speech that is opposed to the resolution. Depending on the grade level and needs of your classroom, you can either have students read the speeches (p5-7) themselves, in partners, in small groups, or out loud with the whole class.
Pro/Con Speeches Worksheet	**15 min**	Tell students that they will now complete a group worksheet to dig deeper into the pro/con speeches and prepare for their own discussion. Separate students into groups of 3-4. If students watched the speeches in video format, distribute paper copies of the pro/con speeches to students (p5-7) and the Pro/Con Speeches Worksheet (p8-9). Once in groups, give students 15 minutes to complete the worksheet and prepare for a class discussion. As students work, circulate the room to provide clarification and guidance as necessary. If students or groups finish early, encourage them to begin thinking about the discussion questions.
Class Discussion	**10 min**	Once students have finished with group work, direct them back to their original seats. Tell students that we will now be holding a classroom discussion to share their views on the pro/con speeches and the freedom to vote act.

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STUDENT RESOURCE

PRO SPEECH

DELIVERED BY THE SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS

Climate change is a serious threat to our planet. In order to combat that threat, we must be as bold in our solutions as possible. This is why I have introduced the Green New Deal, to present the Senate and the American people with an ambitious plan of action.

The Green New Deal aims to protect us from the dangers of climate change by improving our buildings and roads, reducing pollution, and moving the United States completely to clean, renewable energy. It also seeks to make our society more just by guaranteeing all Americans a job, healthcare, housing, clean water and air, healthy and affordable food, and access to nature.

I'd like to address those who understand that climate change is a threat but have some concerns about this resolution. I understand that the projected cost of the Green New Deal is incredibly high. We must remember, however, that the projects proposed in this resolution are designed to change our economy to meet the demands imposed by climate change. This will require massive and rapid investment which only the government can provide, but these investments will ultimately help grow our economy and the nation's collective wealth.

Additionally, there are good reasons why the Green New Deal avoids using well-known climate policies like nuclear power and a carbon tax. With respect to nuclear power, it is simply too dangerous and doesn't produce enough energy relative to its costs to be a real alternative. As for a carbon tax, we cannot simply tax the use of fossil fuels like gasoline and expect workers to figure out other ways to get around. We need to focus on creating clean, affordable transportation alternatives to help working families first before instituting a carbon tax.

I know some of my friends may think that the social programs in this Green New Deal undermine its efforts to fight climate change. However, the effects of climate change disproportionately harm the most impoverished members of our society. If we're serious about addressing climate change, we need to also protect and assist the members of our communities that have been harmed the most by it.

Nearly 60 years ago, President Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." Mister President, I think the American people have worked hard and contributed long enough. I would like to say to all Americans out there that maybe it's time to start asking what your country can do for you. As such, I urge the Senate to vote AYE and adopt the resolution today so that we can begin the much needed work ahead of us.

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STUDENT RESOURCE

CON SPEECH

DELIVERED BY THE SENATOR FROM ARIZONA

The Senator from Massachusetts and I agree that climate change is a real threat that calls for swift, bold action. That said, the Green New Deal misses the mark and threatens to derail serious environmental progress with politically costly and expensive social programs.

The goal of removing greenhouse gas emissions from our economy is so important that we should focus on doing so above all else. It is going to be hard enough to pass any type of environmental legislation through Congress. We can't afford to waste time picking fights on the social safety net that would take years or decades to iron out. Universal healthcare, a jobs guarantee, free public college, and more affordable housing are all great ideas and we should continue to debate and discuss them. However, these policies have no place in a discussion on climate change. Even if we were to adopt all these programs, the Green New Deal doesn't say how we're going to pay for any of it, which is a serious problem with this resolution.

Politics aside, the Green New Deal ignores some more practical environmental policies. One of those policies is a carbon tax and dividend. This plan would allow us to tax all uses of carbon in the country and then give money back to our poorest and most vulnerable residents who need that money the most. The Green New Deal does not include this idea. Additionally, nuclear power has to be part of the solution. I understand the fears and concerns we have about nuclear power, and I believe that nuclear power is not a long-term solution to our energy needs. However, using the nuclear power currently at our disposal will be critical to support a cleaner energy grid as we transition away from fossil fuels. We cannot afford to dismiss an efficient energy source like nuclear power if we're serious about ending our reliance on fossil fuels.
We need drastic action to mitigate the damage that climate change has already caused and will cause in the future. With all due respect to the Senator from Massachusetts, serious problems deserve serious solutions, and while the Green New Deal is a noble ideal to strive toward, it does not help nearly enough in the fight against climate change. I ask the Senate to reject this resolution today so that we can move on to more promising and realistic proposals.

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STUDENT RESOURCE

Pro/Con Speeches Worksheet

Pro Speech:

1. According to the Senator from Massachusetts, how does the Green New Deal protect the United States from climate change?

2. How does the Senator from Massachusetts address concerns regarding the Green New Deal?

3. Why does the Senator claim the Green New Deal does not use proposed solutions to climate change like a carbon tax or nuclear power?

4. Why does the Senator claim social programs are important to combat climate change?

Con Speech:

5. What is one thing both the Senator from Arizona and the Senator from Massachusetts agree on?

6. What are at least two issues with the Green New Deal raised by the Senator from Arizona in their speech?

7. What policies does the Senator from Arizona believe the Green New Deal is missing?

8. According to the Senator from Arizona, is nuclear power a viable energy source? In what ways do the Senator from Arizona and the Senator from Massachusetts disagree on this point?

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Discussion Questions:

1. In your opinion, what were the most important arguments made in the pro speech? Why were those arguments important?

2. In your opinion, what were the most important arguments made in the con speech? Why were those arguments important?

3. Which speech did you find more persuasive? Why was that speech more persuasive than the other?

4. Based on the two speeches, and your own opinion, do you think the Senate should pass the Green New Deal? Why or why not?

5. (optional) What further questions or comments do you have on the Green New Deal and the pro/con speeches?

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Pro/Con Speeches Worksheet (Teacher Copy)

Pro Speech:

1. According to the Senator from Massachusetts, how does the Green New Deal protect the United States from climate change?

The Green New Deal would protect the U.S. from climate change by improving buildings and roads, reducing pollution, and moving the United States to clean, renewable energy. It would also guarantee all Americans a job healthcare, housing, clean water and air, affordable food, and access to nature.

2. How does the Senator from Massachusetts address concerns regarding the Green New Deal?

They address concerns about the high cost of the resolution by emphasizing that the Green New Deal will change our economy to meet the demands of climate change, which will actually grow our economy and our country's wealth.

3. Why does the Senator claim the Green New Deal should not use proposed solutions to climate change like a carbon tax or nuclear power?

The Senator says that nuclear power is too dangerous and does not provide enough energy relative to its costs. According to the Senator, a carbon tax would not be a viable solution because just taxing fossil fuels would end up forcing workers to pay more money. The Senator also says that it's important to focus on creating clean and affordable transportation options before instituting a carbon tax.

4. Why does the Senator claim social programs are important to combat climate change?

The social programs are essential because the effects of climate change disproportionately hurt the most impoverished members of society. It is important that we protect the citizens and communities most vulnerable to climate change as we address the threat of climate change as a whole.

Con Speech:

5. What is one thing both the Senator from Arizona and the Senator from Massachusetts agree on?

The Senator from Arizona and the Senator from Massachusetts agree that climate change is a real threat that requires swift, bold action.

6. What are at least two issues with the Green New Deal raised by the Senator from Arizona in their speech?

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One issue the Senator from Arizona raises is that the Green New Deal is tackling too much, it is important to focus on passing environmental legislation before worrying about the social programs that could lead to lengthy arguments. Another issue the Senator raises is that the Green New Deal does not say how the government will pay for all of the different programs it would implement. A third issue the Senator raises is that the Green New Deal does not utilize some viable solutions to combat climate change like nuclear power and a carbon tax.

7. What policies does the Senator from Arizona believe the Green New Deal is missing?

The Senator claims the green new deal is missing a carbon tax and dividend, which would tax carbon usage in the country and potentially use those tax dollars to help poor and vulnerable citizens. The Green New Deal is also missing nuclear power, which could be a viable energy source.

8. According to the Senator from Arizona, is nuclear power a viable energy source? In what ways do the Senator from Arizona and the Senator from Massachusetts disagree on this point?

The Senator does think Nuclear power is a viable energy source. The Senator from Arizona disagrees with the Senator from Massachusetts regarding the danger of nuclear power, this Senator feels it is worth using and could be a long term source of energy in our country.

Discussion Questions:

1. In your opinion, what were the most important arguments made in the pro speech? Why were those arguments important?

Sample Responses:
- The Green New Deal would shift the United States to clean, renewable energy which would be a much healthier alternative to fossil fuels
- The Green New Deal would improve the lives of many Americans with jobs, healthcare, housing, clean air and water, etc
- The Green New Deal could boost our economy by investing in new infrastructure projects

2. In your opinion, what were the most important arguments made in the con speech? Why were those arguments important?

Sample Responses:
- The Green New Deal is costly, especially with all the social programs it entails

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- It is already hard enough to pass environmental legislation, the Green New Deal will make it even harder to get anything done with all of its social programs
- The Green New Deal overlooks viable strategies to combat climate change like the use of nuclear power and instituting a carbon tax

3. Which speech did you find more persuasive? Why was that speech more persuasive than the other?

This answer is dependent on students' opinions, students should refer back to the speeches and cite relevant evidence to support their claims.

4. Based on the two speeches, and your own opinion, do you think the Senate should pass the Green New Deal? Why or why not?

This answer is dependent on students' opinions, students should refer back to the speeches, and their own prior knowledge, citing relevant evidence to support their claims.

5. (optional) What further questions or comments do you have on the Green New Deal and the pro/con speeches?

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