

Being a Senator Pre-Visit Lesson Introduction

During this pre-visit lesson, students will have an opportunity to learn about what it means to be a United States senator. Students will research a real United States senator, consider their various interests, and make decisions about how their senator would vote on real issues facing the country related to technology policy. Students finish the lesson with a short exit ticket to reflect on how senators make important decisions with local, state, and national implications. Throughout this lesson, students will deepen their understanding of the role legislators play within our government to prepare for their visit to the Edward M Kennedy Institute.

- **Lesson Duration:** 60 minutes

Lesson Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will understand:

- How an elected representative determines their position on particular issues
- What brings political parties together and draws them apart
- How to cite relevant evidence and explain their reasoning when addressing policy issues

Essential Questions

- How do senators balance the interests and needs of the country, their party, their constituents, and their own opinions when taking a position on an issue?
- How do Senators determine the issues which are most important to the country?
- How do Senators address problems facing the U.S.?

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.
- The process of making laws is dynamic and driven by many factors including negotiation and compromise

Pre-Visit Lesson Plan

- **TOTAL TIME:** 50 minutes

Activity	Time	Description
Do Now	5-7 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 how they make decisions themselves, and how they believe lawmakers make decisions. 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. What factors influence you when you're trying to make a tough decision? How do those factor(s) help or hurt your ability to make decisions? 2. Thinking about elected officials in our government, what factors do you think influence them when they're trying to make a tough decision? How do those factor(s) help or hurt their ability to make decisions? Sample Answers: 1. When I'm trying to make a tough decision some factors I think about are how much time I have to make the decision and what my parents will think. If I don't have a lot of time, I may not make the right decision. If I can talk over the decision with my mom or a friend, they might help me make the decision.

		2. Elected officials have to consider what their voters will think about their decision and how that decision will affect their voters. Voters could make it easier or harder for someone in government to make a decision. They could make it easier if the officials' voters all have similar opinions, but they could make it harder if the best decision is not something the voters would like.
Teacher Model	5-7 min	Tell students that today during class they will be researching real United States senators and thinking about how they might make decisions about issues facing the country. Students will get a chance to learn more about a senator of their choice to prepare for the Senate Immersion Module. Inform students that you will give them an example of how they can research their senator and directions for how to complete their decisions worksheet. Make sure all students have their Senator Resume (p 6-7) and their Senator Decisions Worksheet (p 10-11) ready while you explain the activity. Walk students through how to fill out the Senator Resume using the links provided and discuss what factors you'd think about when considering one of the senator decisions. Emphasize that if students don't have an answer to every question on the senator resume that is okay, but they should try to complete some of each section. For the technology policy portion of the resume, direct students to focus on any of the technology topics encompassed in the SIM program- artificial intelligence, social media, or data privacy. After the teacher model, ask

		students, “what questions do you have about this activity before you try it yourself?”
Senator Resume	15-20 min	Instruct students to complete their senator resume based on the senator of their choice. Remind students to refer back to your model as they work if they need help and raise their hand if they need any further assistance. While students are working, circulate the classroom and provide assistance as needed. If any students finish their senator resume early, you can instruct them to begin thinking about the senator decisions on their worksheet.
Senator Decisions	15-20 min	Separate students into groups of 3-4. Tell students, now that they have completed their senator resume and understand a little bit about the senator they’ll be role playing, it’s time to make some real decisions about issues facing the United States. Emphasize to students that while working in small groups to address the various issues, they should act as the senator from their resume. Emphasize to students that they should deeply consider the interests of their nation, their state, their political party, and their own personal beliefs when making decisions. Also remind students that their fellow senators may disagree with them, and it’s important to be respectful of their views and seek a compromise if necessary. Before separating into groups, ask students, “what questions do you have about this activity before we begin?” Once any confusion is cleared up students should begin completing their senator decisions worksheet in small

		groups.
Exit Ticket	5-7 min	Once students have finished their senator decisions worksheet, direct them back to their original seats if they moved during group work. Instruct students to complete the exit ticket questions below to reflect on this experience and their learning. If time does not allow the exit ticket to be completed during class, it can be completed as a homework assignment. Exit Ticket Questions: 1. What have you learned today about how elected representatives determine how they are going to vote on a particular issue? 2. What are at least two factors elected officials must take into account when making decisions? Sample Answers: 1. I learned that elected officials may have competing interests that make it challenging for them to decide when voting on certain topics. I also learned that compromise is very important, because during the group activity a lot of other senators held opinions that were different from mine but we still had to act on the issues facing the country. 2. Some of the factors that elected officials have to take into account when making decisions are the needs of their state, country, political party, and their own personal opinion.

STUDENT RESOURCE

U.S. Senator Resume

Learn about your state's senators by visiting their Senate websites or this link:

<https://www.congress.gov/members>

Learn more about your political party by clicking these links:

Republicans: <https://gop.com/about-our-party/>

Democrats: <https://democrats.org>

Research your senator to find relevant information listed below. You should utilize the Congress.gov website and the link to your senators website. You may include additional information in each area and conduct additional research if time allows.

<u>Senator</u>
<u>Name:</u>
<u>State:</u>
<u>Party:</u>
<u>Years in Senate:</u>
<u>Committee Assignments:</u>
<u>Work Prior to Senate:</u>
<u>Personal Interests:</u>
<u>Technology Policy:</u>

<u>State</u>
<u>Population:</u>
<u>Largest Industries:</u>
<u>Specific State Challenges or Interests Related to Technology:</u>

<u>Political Party</u>
<u>Top Priorities of Political Party:</u>
<u>Political Party Policies Related to Technology:</u>

U.S. Senator Resume (Teacher Copy)

Learn about your states senators by clicking this link:

<https://www.congress.gov/members?q=%7B%22congress%22%3A118%2C%22chamber%22%3A%22Senate%22%7D>

Learn more about your political party by clicking these links:

Republicans: <https://gop.com/about-our-party/>

Democrats: <https://democrats.org/where-we-stand/party-platform/>

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<u>Senator</u>
<u>Name:</u> Gary Peters <u>State:</u> Michigan <u>Party:</u> Democrat <u>Years in Senate:</u> 9 <u>Work Prior to Senate:</u> Financial advisor, Rochester Hills City Councilman, MI state senate, State Lottery Commissioner, U.S. Navy Reserve, U.S. House of Representatives <u>Personal Interests:</u> Finance, law, artificial intelligence <u>Technology Policy:</u> Author of many technology related bills including the ANCHOR Act which aims to improve cybersecurity and telecommunications of our armed forces and the Technology Workforce Framework Act of 2024 which aims to improve workforce training for artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies.

<u>State</u>

Population: 10.03 million

Largest Industries: Auto parts, Automobiles, Health and medical insurance

Specific State Challenges or Interests Related to technology: The University of Michigan is at the forefront of research and education related to artificial intelligence, developing its own generative AI tools.

Political Party

Top Priorities of Political Party: Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic; Building a stronger, fairer economy; Achieving universal, affordable, quality healthcare; reforming our criminal justice system; Restoring and strengthening our democracy

Political Party Policies to Technology Reform: Under the Democratic platform for education, the party stresses the gaps in technology within our nation's schools and their desire to make it more equitable. The Democrats also stress their desire for technological innovation in our military under the Renewing American Leadership portion of their platform.

STUDENT RESOURCE

Senator Decisions

Directions: For each scenario, discuss with your group members and write 2-3 sentences explaining how you would vote in this situation and why. All of these scenarios are based on actual issues facing United States senators.

Scenario #1:

TikTok, an extremely popular social media platform, has been a major source of controversy. The company's owner, ByteDance, is located in China and some Americans are concerned regarding the potential for their data to be accessed by a foreign nation. The House of Representatives has just passed a bill requiring ByteDance to either sell the TikTok platform to an American corporation or the platform will be banned in the United States. It is unclear whether the company would sell TikTok, and this bill could ban the app on all devices across the United States. TikTok is especially popular with young Americans, and many 18-30 year old voters have called your office expressing outrage about the bill claiming it infringes on their rights of expression. On the other hand, national security advisors have briefed your office on the potential for TikTok to sow misinformation among the American public. This TikTok bill now must be voted on in the Senate and you have to decide whether to vote for or against the legislation. How will you vote on this bill? Explain your reasoning.

Scenario #2:

One of your fellow senators has just introduced a bill called the “Stop Spying Bosses Act.” If passed, this legislation would require employers to disclose any data they are collecting on their employees, prevent employers from collecting sensitive data on employees (example: data collected while they are off duty), and more. With the increase in work from home jobs following the COVID pandemic, more Americans are working outside of the office and employers have begun tracking and monitoring their behavior significantly more closely- often measuring how much time an employees computer sits idle or even monitoring employees location. Several business leaders in your state and across the country have come out against this bill claiming employee monitoring is necessary to ensure productivity with so many Americans working from home. However, many workers unions and civil rights organizations have expressed their support for the bill claiming it would protect employees' right to privacy. Before

voting on the bill, you have the opportunity to make a statement on the senate floor. Are you for or against this legislation? Make sure to thoroughly explain your answer.

Scenario #3:

You're a member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation which is a small group of senators who study and review all legislative matters relating to science and technology policy. The Technology Workforce Frameworks Act has just been referred to your committee. This bill requires the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to create a system for incorporating emerging technologies in our workforce, requires the Director of NIST to develop a plan to address artificial intelligence's impact on our workforce, and requires NIST to periodically update the government regarding AI and cybersecurity impacts on America's workforce. As a committee member, you have to decide whether to recommend any amendments or changes to this legislation and determine whether you will support or oppose this legislation. What amendments would you make to this bill? Will you support or oppose this bill? Make sure to explain your reasoning.

Senator Decisions (Teacher Copy)

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Scenario #1:

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Sample answer: I will vote against this bill. Though there are potential national security concerns, American citizens have a right to express themselves and many young people choose to do that through social media and TikTok specifically. The potential for this bill to ban a platform used by so many American citizens, in my view, outweighs the potential data privacy and national security concerns. I also received a large percentage of the youth vote in my last election and I am not willing to lose those young voters by banning their favorite social media site.

Scenario #2:

One of your fellow senators has just introduced a bill called the “Stop Spying Bosses Act.” If passed, this legislation would require employers to disclose any data they are collecting on their employees, prevent employers from collecting sensitive data on employees (example: data collected while they are off duty), and more. With the increase in work from home jobs

following the COVID pandemic, more Americans are working outside of the office and employers have begun tracking and monitoring their behavior significantly more closely- often measuring how much time an employees computer sits idle or even monitoring employees location. Several business leaders in your state and across the country have come out against this bill claiming employee monitoring is necessary to ensure productivity with so many Americans working from home. However, many workers unions and civil rights organizations have expressed their support for the bill claiming it would protect employees' right to privacy. Before voting on the bill, you have the opportunity to make a statement on the senate floor. Are you for or against this legislation? Make sure to thoroughly explain your answer.

Sample Answer: I am in favor of this legislation. My political party strongly supports workers rights and this bill would help protect America's workers from a significant intrusion into their privacy by the companies they work for. While researching my party platform I learned that the Democratic party seeks to build a fairer economy where all Americans can succeed and this legislation would help to make that happen by evening the playing field between workers and their employers. Additionally, workers unions have a lot of power in my state and supporting this legislation may help me secure their endorsements in my next election.

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Sample Answer: I would add an amendment to this legislation directing the NIST to specifically address the needs of low income and hourly workers when developing a plan to address artificial intelligence's impact on the workforce. This is important because many of these workers are living paycheck to paycheck and any disruption or issues with their job carry much more risk to negatively impact their lives compared to workers earning a higher salary. I would also support this bill because it is essential that our nation is prepared for the economy of tomorrow and this bill is a step in the right direction to achieving that.