



Committee Hearing Simulation

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject: American Government and Civics

Prepared by: Unicameral Information Office

Overview & Purpose

The simulation is meant to provide students an understanding of the committee process on a bill in the Nebraska Legislature. Students play the roles of senators, lobbyists and concerned citizens. Following the mock public hearing, committee members meet in an executive session to decide what action to take on the bill.

Standards Alignment

- SS 12.1.1.e Analyze and evaluate the foundation, structures and functions of state government (e.g., bicameral/unicameral, reapportionment/redistricting, branches of government)
- SS 12.1.2.a Evaluate how individuals and groups can effectively use the structure and functions of various levels of government to shape policy (e.g., lobbying, voting, contacting government officials, petitioning)
- SS 12.1.2.c Engage in civic activities (e.g., discussing current issues, advocating for personal rights and the rights of others, influencing governmental actions, participating in civil discourse, registering for selective service, participating in community improvement activities, service learning)
- SS 12.1.2.d Analyze an issue and determine which level of government is most appropriate to utilize in addressing the issue
- SS 12.1.2.e Describe the roles and influences of individuals, groups and the media as checks on governmental practices (e.g., interest groups, political action committees, lobbyists, public opinion polls)
- SS 12.2.11.a Examine how governments can use taxing and spending policies to influence behavior (e.g., alcohol tax, home mortgage interest deduction)

Materials Provided in Committee Hearing Zip File

Legislative bill (five options are provided)

Bill overview

Committee chairperson script

Committee statement sheet (blank)

Preparation (approximately 20 minutes)

- Play the Committee Hearing clips provided for the class on a large screen or white board.
- Assign students their roles. The simulation requires at least seven committee members, a bill sponsor and four testifiers, (two proponents of the bill and two opponents). Note that additional testifiers may be added as time allows if students wish to develop their own testimony. Be sure that the committee has an odd number of members to avoid tie votes, and designate one student as the committee chairperson.
- Students serving as the bill sponsor and proponent testifiers will need to develop talking points to make their case for the bill. Opponents of the bill will prepare testimony against the bill. (Refer to the bill overview page for talking points for each bill, which is located in the committee hearing zip file).
- The committee chairperson's script can be found in the zip file of committee hearing documents. Give the students a few minutes to become familiar with their materials and to arrange their seating.
- Pass out and review copies of the chosen bill. Explain to students the general nature of the bill.

Setting Up Your Classroom

- Place seven student desks at the front of the classroom, facing the rest of the room. These desks will represent the committee members. The committee's chairperson will sit in the middle desk.
- Place a table or student desk facing the committee members. This will be the testifier table. The student senator sponsoring the bill will present the bill introduction from this desk. Proponent and opponent testimony also will be given from the testifier table.
- The remaining students will sit in the "audience" facing the committee members. Testifiers will also sit in the audience when not delivering testimony.

Activity (approximately 35 minutes)

- It may be necessary during the hearing process to remind committee members that the purpose of the hearing is to gather citizen input and to learn from experts in the field in order to better understand the legislation they will be voting on.
- The chairperson should bring the hearing to order, following the script provided. Be sure to remind the student senators that they may speak only when recognized by the chairperson and may ask questions only when each individual's five-minute testimony has concluded.
- Once testimony has concluded and the bill introducer has finished his or her closing statement, the student senators will enter executive session. Explain to students that in the actual Legislature, executive sessions are closed to the public so that senators may speak freely while wrestling with the difficult aspects of a bill.
- The teacher will act as the committee's legal counsel and will call a vote of the committee for each proposed committee amendment. Those receiving a majority vote (4 of 7 members) will make up the committee amendments that advance with the bill to the full legislature.
- In executive session, a committee may take the following actions by a majority vote:
 - advance the bill to the full legislature in its current form;
 - advance it with a committee amendment; or
 - kill the bill.

Summary (approximately 15 minutes)

- Ask students what they learned from the simulation and what it reveals about the lawmaking process. Discuss the importance of citizen participation. What makes a good senator?
- Further information and lesson plan ideas for learning about the Nebraska Legislature can be found at http://www.legislature.ne.gov/education/student_programs.php.