



**Title: Mock Senate**

Adapted from Barbara Browning, Homer High School

**Theme:** Legislation surrounding oil spill prevention and restoration, energy development, and conservation must go through a rigorous process.

**Objectives:**

- Students will understand the legislative process.
- Students will participate in a senate simulation.
- Students will experience the give and take, the party alliances, and the stress and preparations involved in passing legislation.

**Duration:** 2 weeks

**Age Range:** 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Materials:**

- Example bill
- Mock Senate Guidelines
- Roberts Rules of Order
- Journals or notecards
- Pens or pencils

**Background:**

As a result of the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill many types of legislative bills were introduced both at the state and national level. In recent years, many bills related to the development of renewable energy sources, cleaner energy technologies, and innovations in conservation have been deliberated. Introducing new, or changing old, legislation is a long and complicated process yet one that should be understood by citizens. Understanding the difficulties in making and changing laws will help students gain insight into the political process and the challenges of trying to implement change. The mock senate exercise is an opportunity for students to research issues of importance to their state and to role play the political process where they will introduce bills important to them. The Mock Senate exercise, developed by Barbara Browning, has been used with high success rates in her Homer High School classroom. Students enjoy being involved in the entire process.

The Senate can hold subcommittee hearings, committee hearings, and then, a final hearing on the floor before the full Senate for each issue or bill. Finally, one bill is passed out of the Senate. The same happens in the House. The Senate and House

then get together in conference and basically make trade-offs, concessions, compromises, etc., to pass one combined bill. The bill goes to the President who signs it into law or vetoes it.

### **Introduction:**

Ask students if they remember learning about the process of passing a bill. List, on the board, points and procedures they remember. Ask students how they think companies such as Exxon are regulated. What do they think it takes to set aside land as a national park or a wildlife refuge? Introduce the idea of a “Mock Senate” where students will actually play the roles of legislators and write and pass bills.

### **Activities & Procedures:**

Each student must pick a party affiliation and research their own state to find oil spill/energy issues and view points of their state and their party. They will present a state profile. (See Mock Senate Guidelines). Have students present their information in outline form. Elect or appoint a President of the Senate and a Secretary. Have the President review the roles of the President and Secretary of the Senate, as well as the senators. Inform them that the President will be responsible for presenting a sample bill and explaining the rules of conduct in the senate.

Introduce the sample bill. Review the format. Have students copy the format in their journals. Tell the students they will be responsible for introducing two (2) bills. One bill must concern an energy-related economic change that would benefit their state and/or nation; one must solve or deal with an oil related problem in their state and/or the nation. Have students review proposed bills related to these topics by searching the Alaska Bill Action Status Inquiry System (<http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/start.asp>) and the national GovTrack.us database (<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/>)

This exercise assumes that the students are already familiar with party roles, legislative proceedings, passing bills, etc. If this is not the case, you will need to review some of these aspects with the students.

The senate proceedings should run by Roberts’ Rules of Order. Students should be encouraged to assume the viewpoints of their respective party affiliation. The bills they introduce should also reflect their party’s viewpoint.

During the Senate sessions have students submit a newspaper item about the Senate proceedings. It may be an article, letter to the editor, political cartoon, etc. It must concern someone or something that happens in the Senate proceedings. It should be typed or drawn in black ink.

The key to the success of the Mock Senate is participation. Students need to be encouraged to introduce bills or amendments and to speak in defense of or in

opposition to other bills, etc. The Mock Senate should be in session for at least one week in order to give students ample time to participate in the entire process.

Each day, take the first 5 minutes and have the students write a reaction to the session the day before either in their journals or on 8x10 note cards.

As a final activity, the secretary should publish, in the school paper or on the school website, a list of bills passed by the Senate. Have the sponsors of each passed bill write a short summary of the purpose and intent of the bill. Compare bills passed in the Mock Senate to state and federal legislative happenings.

### **Wrap-Up**

Discuss how their experience in the mock senate reinforced or changed students' perceptions about the legislative process. Have students submit a public comment or letter to the editor about current local, state, or national legislation in reference to energy, oil spills, environmental restoration, fisheries, subsistence or wildlife. Be sure that the students' comments reflect their own opinions and provide an option for students to remain anonymous.

### **Evaluation:**

Assess student understanding based on their completed state profiles, draft bills, newspaper contributions, and comments during the mock senate. Observe participation, adherence to Roberts Rules of Order, and respectful tone during debate and discussion.

## Mock Senate - Example of a Bill

Senate Bill No. \_\_\_\_\_

In the Legislature of the state of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (#) Legislature - \_\_\_\_\_ (1st or 2nd) session.

A Bill

For an Act entitled: "An Act Concerning ....."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF \_\_\_\_\_:

Section 1.

Section 2.

## Mock Senate Guidelines

### STATE PROFILE (All Senators):

A. State name

B. State Government: strongest political party, male: female ratio of Senators and Representatives, political parties, anything else of interest.

C. Economics: types of industry, unemployment rate, income levels, poverty rate, job growth rate, tax base, spending, etc. (see the Almanac)

D. People: population, changes in population, urban/rural ratio, racial mix, religion, age spread, etc.

E. Other: education, violent crimes, major concerns or problems, environmental concerns, pollution, development, etc. These should be items that as a Senator, you want to try to solve, or would influence how you vote.

### PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE:

1. You must plan and deliver a presentation on the rules of conduct in the Senate (Roberts' Rules of Order).
2. Plan a bill that will be presented to the class as an example.
3. Prepare and give a quiz on the following day.
4. When in session, be present every day, maintain order, run by the rules you establish.

### SECRETARY:

1. You must be present every day. If the President cannot be present, you will be expected to run the Senate.
2. Make a poster of all the Senators and their political parties and highlight socioeconomic characteristics of your state.
3. Keep a daily summary of bills introduced, passed and amended.
4. If your school has a newspaper, have a printed summary of the bills and the action on the bills.

## Mock Senate Standards

Science and Technology: Students develop an understanding of the relationships among science, technology, and society.

### SE1

Students develop an understanding of how scientific knowledge and technology are used in making decisions about issues, innovations, and responses to problems and everyday events.

The student demonstrates an understanding of how to integrate scientific knowledge and technology to address problems by:

[7] SE1.1 describing how public policy affects the student's life (e.g., public waste disposal)

[8] SE1.1 describing how public policy affects the student's life and participating diplomatically in evidence-based discussions relating to the student's community

[9] SE1.1 recognizing that the value of any given technology may be different for different groups of people and at different points in time (e.g., different uses of snow machines in different regions of Alaska)

[10] SE1.1 identifying that progress in science and invention is highly interrelated to what else is happening in society

[11] SE1.1 researching how social, economic, and political forces strongly influence which technology will be developed and used

Cultural, Social, Personal Perspectives, and Science: Students develop an understanding of the dynamic relationships among scientific, cultural, social, and personal perspectives.

### SF1

Students develop an understanding of the interrelationships among individuals, cultures, societies, science, and technology.

### SF2

Students develop an understanding that some individuals, cultures, and societies use other beliefs and methods in addition to scientific methods to describe and understand the world.

### SF3

Students develop an understanding of the importance of recording and validating cultural knowledge.

The student demonstrates an understanding of the dynamic relationships among scientific, cultural, social, and personal perspectives by:

[10] SF1.1-SF3.1 analyzing the competition for resources by various user groups to describe these interrelationships

[11] SF1.1-SF3.1 investigating the influences of societal and/or cultural beliefs on science

## Alaska History

### Alaska as a State (1959-Present)

AH. PPE 5 comparing and contrasting the differing perspectives between rural and urban areas.

AH. CPD 5 using texts/sources to analyze the multiple perspectives in the continuing debate between conservation and development of resources.

AH. CC 7 comparing and contrasting the perspectives of sport, commercial, and subsistence users on policies regarding fish and game management.

## Content Standards: Citizenship and Government

B: A student should understand the constitutional foundations of the American political system and the democratic ideals of this nation.

A student who meets the content standard should:

1) understand the ideals of this nation as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights;

2) recognize American heritage and culture, including the republican form of government, capitalism, free enterprise system, patriotism, strong family units, and freedom of religion;

3) understand the United States Constitution, including separation of powers, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, majority rule, and minority rights;

- 4) know how power is shared in the United States' constitutional government at the federal, state, and local levels;
- 5) understand the importance of individuals, public opinion, media, political parties, associations, and groups in forming and carrying out public policy;
- 6) recognize the significance of diversity in the American political system;
- 7) distinguish between constitution-based ideals and the reality of American political and social life;
- 8) understand the place of law in the American political system; and
- 9) recognize the role of dissent in the American political system.

E: A student should have the knowledge and skills necessary to participate effectively as an informed and responsible citizen.

A student who meets the content standard should:

- 1) know the important characteristics of citizenship;
- 2) recognize that it is important for citizens to fulfill their public responsibilities;
- 3) exercise political participation by discussing public issues, building consensus, becoming involved in political parties and political campaigns, and voting;
- 4) establish, explain, and apply criteria useful in evaluating rules and laws;
- 5) establish, explain, and apply criteria useful in selecting political leaders;
- 6) recognize the value of community service; and
- 7) implement ways of solving problems and resolving conflict.