Handout A: Background Essay—The Nature of Representation in the U.S. Congress Answer Key

Critical Thinking Questions

1. The U.S. system separates power by electing Congress separately from the election for president. This means that the President might not be from the same political party as the majority in Congress. Legislation in the U.S. system takes longer to pass, and Presidents are not guaranteed to achieve any of their legislative program. Nor can Congress easily legislate without presidential support.

2. Political parties in the U.S. provide resources to help elect and re-elect members. Political parties in the U.S. are generally weaker than political parties in a parliamentary system, particularly one that uses proportional representation.

3. U.S. members of Congress represent both their geographic district and the nation as a whole, as well as their political party. Conflict and tension can result when the interests of a district do not match the interests of the entire nation, or when the program of a political party does not match the interest of a member’s district.

4. To act as a trustee rather than a delegate means that a member acts in what s/he believes is the best interest of the district or the nation, even if that decision may not match the opinion of a majority of the people in the district. Civic virtues needed for this include: courage, moderation, responsibility and prudence.

Handout B: Two Hypothetical Countries Answer Key

Country A: Transalpinia is using a system closest to the U.S. Congress. Members of the legislature are elected separately from the executive and serve terms of a length different from the executive. Power is separated between the executive and the legislature but political parties serve to connect the branches. It is possible, however, for the executive and legislative to be at loggerheads. Transalpinia is roughly based on the French Fifth Republic.

Country B: Tutonia is using a system that more closely resembles a parliamentary system. Members of the legislature are elected using a proportional representation system, rather than the single district system of the United States. Elections are not held at fixed times, but at the will of the legislature. The chief executive is elected by the legislature, and so there is little separation between branches. Political parties play an essential role in organizing the legislature and choosing the executive. Tutonia is roughly based on the Federal Republic of Germany.
Handout C: Proportional or Single Member Districts? Answer Key

1. The major arguments in favor of proportional representation:
   a. Allows for ethnic minorities to have a greater voice
   b. Allows for a greater number of political parties to be present
   c. Gives voters more alternatives and policy options.

2. The major arguments in favor of single member districts
   a. Allows voters to hold individual members accountable
   b. Allows constituents to have an ombudsman to advocate for them
   c. Organizes government and opposition to give two clear alternatives to voters
   d. Prevents small parties from exerting disproportionate control

3. When doing the opinion continuum, consider prohibiting students from standing in the exact middle—encourage them to take a stand at least to some extent, toward one system or the other.

Handout D: Delegate or Trustee? Answer Key

Congressman Alvarez is acting as a delegate—notice his attention to discovering his constituent’s opinions, and his intention to vote as they wish, not as he thinks is in the best interest of the district or the country.

Congressman Zito is acting as a trustee. Notice how she takes pains to explain her guiding principles to her constituents, and her intention to follow those guiding principles.

Handout E: Congressional Voting Scenarios: Competing Interests Answer Key

The scenarios are loosely based on real events

Scenario 1: The competing interests:
- District: no new taxes, no benefit cuts
- National: growing debt will strangle future budgets.
- Lawmaking: this may be the only way to get spending cuts.
- Party: no new taxes, but consider spending cuts.

This scenario is based on the dilemma faced by the Republicans when presented with George H. W. Bush’s 1991 budget. The Congress voted for a tax increase and a freeze, although not a reduction,
in government spending. Both Democrats and Republicans voted against the budget, although enough members from both parties voted in favor, and the budget as passed. George H. W. Bush was defeated for re-election in 1992, and some believe his decision to raise taxes was held against him by Republicans, who chose to stay home rather than vote for him.

Scenario 2: The competing interests:
- District: very thin majority in favor of the war
- National: will the war advance the interests of the country more than the cost?
- Party: own party divided, opposition party in favor. A “no” vote could be held against you at re-election time.

This scenario is based on the situation faced by the Democrats in 2002, when George W. Bush asked for congressional authorization to go to war with Iraq (although in keeping with all presidents since Harry S Truman, he denied he needed such permission). The Democrats were badly divided on the question, with many of them voting in favor of the war, and a smaller number voting against. Hillary Clinton, then senator from New York, voted in favor of the war. Bernie Sanders, then senator from Vermont, voted against.

Scenario 3: The competing interests:
- District: good for the people of the district
- National: increase the public debt
- Lawmaking: this may be the only way to get the money to fix the road
- Party: your party supports the bill, so does the opposition. A no vote could be held against you at re-election time.

This scenario is the general dilemma faced by so-called “pork barrel” spending programs. What is good for a single district might be bad for the country as a whole.

Scenario 4: The competing interests:
- District: May well hurt civilian contractors, inconvenience other constituents
- National: Will forcing a resolution of the underlying problem through a crisis be good for the country?
- Lawmaking: Does the bill to sidestep the issue simply put off the problem for later?
- Party: if your party is blamed for the shutdown, will it affect your re-election?
This scenario is based on the various government shut downs and threatened shut downs in 1994, 1995, 2011, 2013, and 2015.

**Scenario 5:** The competing interests:
- District: lots of good jobs might be gained
- National: Could the money be used more effectively for national defense?
- Party: your party expects you to vote against.

We go back to the early 1980s for this scenario, to the experience of Alan Cranston, Democratic senator from California. The plane was the B1 bomber, supported by Ronald Reagan. Senator Cranston, who supported a freeze on the building of nuclear weapons, nevertheless voted in favor of building the B1. When Cranston ran for president in 1984, the Democrats held the B1 vote against him, and they nominated Walter Mondale instead. Mondale lost to Ronald Reagan in a landslide.