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N E W S R E L E A S E

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Nebraska students split on U.S. foreign policy

LINCOLN—In a recent national survey, Nebraska high school students were split in their opinions about whether the guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy should be isolationism or international cooperation.

More than 400 students in Nebraska completed ballots as part of the eighth Nebraska Capitol Forum on America's Future, co-sponsored by the Nebraska Humanities Council and Secretary of State John Gale's office. Students in Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Rhode Island, Washington, and West Virginia also participated in the 2006 Capitol Forum. Nationwide, 1,643 students submitted ballots expressing their concerns, priorities and vision for our nation's future.

Choosing from four distinct proposals for the future of U.S. foreign policy, more than 61 percent of Nebraska respondents identified as their first or second choice a future in which the United States would protect the homeland and sharply scale back foreign involvement. Students favored this policy even if it might "upset the worldwide balance of power and cause insecure countries to seek nuclear, biological and chemical weapons." Nationally, this policy ranked third (50 percent).

Complicating this support for isolationism is similar strong support for international cooperation. In Nebraska, 69 percent of the respondents supported the statement that "in today's interconnected world, many serious problems can be addressed only through international cooperation." Three out of four students in the national poll identified as their top choice a future in which the United States would "take the initiative to bring the nations of the world together and play a leadership role." This policy ranked second among Nebraska students (57 percent), up from third place (50 percent) last year.

For the third consecutive year, a future in which the U.S. would spread democracy around the world was the least popular policy in both Nebraska and nationally.

When Nebraska students were asked what foreign policy actions should be taken, they ranked as their first priority a crack-down on illegal immigration and a policy to accept fewer immigrants (60.5 percent). This rose from second place last year (54.5 percent). The elimination of nuclear weapons fell from first place last year (55 percent) to fourth this year (44 percent).

Nationally, placing trade sanctions on countries that threaten their neighbors dropped from first last year to fourth this year, although it rose from fourth to third in Nebraska. The 2006 national poll ranks negotiating international standards for the environment as first priority and immigration concerns as second. In Nebraska, environment standards ranked second this year.

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As part of Capitol Forum, 98 students and 20 teachers from high schools in Lincoln, Omaha, Bellevue, Millard, Ashland, Cambridge, Chadron, Crofton, Holdrege, Howells, Lynch, Plainview, Potter, Springfield, Sterling, Sumner, Valentine, Wausa, and Wilcox gathered on March 27 at the State Capitol to debate the four options for the future of U.S. foreign policy.

They returned to their schools to broaden the discussion with classmates and complete the survey. Among the topics discussed were immigration, terrorism, the environment, international trade, and proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The Capitol Forum curriculum is provided by Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies. In Nebraska, the 2006 Capitol Forum was funded in part by the "We the People" initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities and by the Cooper Foundation.

For more details on Capitol Forum, visit the Nebraska Humanities Council website at www.nebraskahumanities.org.

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Editors: Complete national survey results are available at: www.choices.edu/capitol_forum/capf_ballot_repts.cfm.