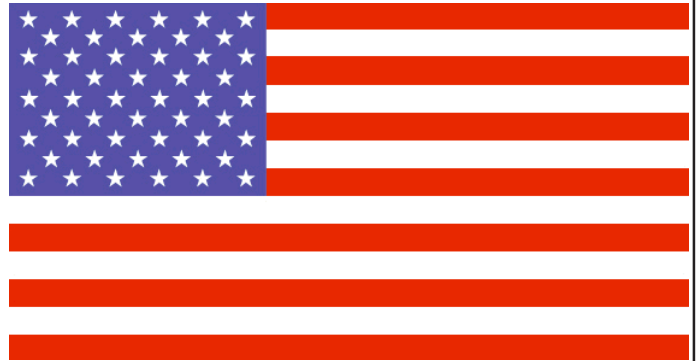


Student
Perspectives:

This **Newsweek**
Week

Patriot Act: The Pros And Cons



The essay "Where Do You Stand on the USA Patriot Act?" (pages 2-3) is the result of students' weeklong participation in the Presidential Classroom education program. During the week, students share their ideas on topics that are important to them. They challenge others to listen to student perspectives. They investigate. They debate. They act. For one week in Washington, these students from around the country divide into "caucuses" representing various topics of their choice. Over the course of the week, their research goes beyond a school setting—sometimes involving direct contact with elected officials—and results in an oral presentation and written essay. The essay is presented with minimal editing, to reflect the students' original ideas and presentation.

Read the essay, and consider the following:

Carefully read the Current Issues Report titled "Where Do You Stand on the USA Patriot Act?" on pages 2 and 3. Highlight or note points where you agree or disagree and where you want to know more.

■ Evaluate the structure of the essay. In what ways does it work well? In what ways do you think it could be improved?

■ Examine the arguments on both sides of the debate about the USA Patriot Act. Are they succinctly summarized? Would you present the arguments differently? How?

■ Take one argument—either on the "pro" or the "con" side—and explore it in depth. Consider these questions: Is the argument based on factual evidence or conjecture? Can history be used as a guide? How might someone on the other side of the issue respond to the argument? While conducting your research, did you come across additional

significant information? Share it with your classmates.

■ Evaluate the conclusion of "Where Do You Stand on the USA Patriot Act?" In what ways is it effective? In what ways might it be strengthened? Does the conclusion make you more or less likely to agree with the authors? Why?

■ Now that you know more about the USA Patriot Act, where do you stand on the issue? Prepare a position paper or oral report in which you explain your position and attempt to convince others to accept your point of view. Be sure to include supporting arguments, while also disposing of the arguments on the opposite side of the issue. Wrap up with a compelling conclusion.

■ Conduct a survey—of your family, your peers or your neighbors—to gauge sentiments about the USA Patriot Act. Compare your survey results with those of another student.

Presidential Classroom
Extra!

Where Do You Stand on the USA Patriot Act?

The following students were members of the Presidential Classroom caucus that composed the essay below:

Diana Abriola, Michelle Acosta, Nancy Aquino, Erica Austin, Timothy Bella, Mary-Kate Bustard, Heather Casady, Meghan Clarke, Sarah Cooper, Melanie Craig, Maite De La Rosa, Tho Do, Nathan Donovan, Elizabeth Eckman, Erin Frey, Doris Gines, Amanda Gose, Chelle Green, Chelsea Hoagland, Eric Jacobson, Hee Jang, Sadrea Johnson, Lana Kovnot, Meagan Larwood, Amber Mathewson, Samantha McQuaig, Daphne Monaco, Brittanie Morris, Lindsay Oesch, Catherine Paty, Alix Pease, Julianne Pierantozzi, Katherine Powell, Kenneth Reinbold, Kelly Reynolds, Jennifer Ringrose, Ellen Sawyer, Marc Serber, Robert Trost, Munish Viralam, Benjamin Wiele and Elizabeth Wilson.

Freedom in the United States has become increasingly constricted since 2001. Not only did the terrorist attacks of September 11 have a drastic effect on the U.S. economy, but our nation's response has tested the limits of America's core freedoms.

Congress passed the USA Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) in 2001 just weeks after the attacks, with the intention of helping law enforcement act more effectively in investigating potential terrorists.

However, this act may do more harm than good. Some groups, such as the American Library Association, state that the act infringes on Fourth Amendment rights guaranteed to us in the Constitution. Others, however, say that the legislation will help protect citizens from potential terrorist attacks. This essay, written and compiled by students in Presidential Classroom, will investigate the pros and cons of the USA Patriot Act and come to a conclusion about it.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF THE PATRIOT ACT

Many Americans are in favor of the Patriot Act because they are under the impression that it will increase national security in these perilous times. Supporters state that it reduces terrorists' ability to operate within the United States by allowing law enforcement to access information such as bank statements, library records and emails without notifying individuals of the search. Supporters also claim that the act cultivates cooperation between the FBI and CIA, allowing officials to easily obtain information about individuals suspected to be threats to national security. In this way, the two organizations work together in an unprecedented fashion to thwart criminal activity, including terrorist plots.

Another point for those in favor of the act is its "sunset

clause," which only keeps the law in effect until the end of 2005. As the act expires, government officials will review its effectiveness and consequently decide on the value of a second USA Patriot Act. Supporters also argue that the implementation of this act has proved successful, as there have been no large-scale terrorist attacks in the United States since September 11. This fact gives supporters confidence in the future results of the USA Patriot Act. In addition to this fact, supporters of the law think that although the USA Patriot Act does limit some freedoms, it is essentially for the betterment and survival of the people in the end. They believe that there are compromises to make in order to establish a better good—and that compromises are called for in these circumstances. Ultimately, the purpose of the act, supporters say, is to temporarily increase national security and act as a shield between the American public and terrorist organizations.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE PATRIOT ACT

Opponents of the act however, such as the American Library Association of Research Libraries, say that the legislation "threatens the rights of the public and undermines the confidentiality that is crucial for the flow of information needed for the provision of library services and, importantly, the vitality of our democracy." The association feels that the easy flow of information through the library system has been threatened by the act. As a result, people will refrain from obtaining information from some research resources out of fear that each action could lead to trouble.

Many other foes of the USA Patriot Act argue that the law threatens rights guaranteed to American citizens in the Fourth Amendment, which states that "the right of the people to be "secure in their persons, Houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated; and

no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched and the persons or things to be seized.”

Those against the act feel that the federal government obtained too much power with its passage. They feel that we should not compromise the Constitution and they question the effectiveness of the act in stopping terrorists. They declare that the act is unconstitutional and will ultimately be decided so by the Supreme Court.

Many of those against the act cite ideas presented by George Orwell in his novel “1984”—mainly the concept of “Big Brother.” In the book, Orwell introduces the maladies of a totalitarian government known as “Big Brother,” by describing a negative utopia in which the government monitors and regulates all aspects of life. The “Big Brother” concept elicits suspicion among all members of society, and often leads to false accusations of crime and unlawful punishments. Opponents of the act state that the mishandling of it could possibly lead to similar effects. Although the act may some day expire as a result of its sunset clause, they argue that the act will provide a basis for future laws that infringe on civil rights.

IN CONCLUSION

In order to resolve the issues associated with the USA Patriot Act, there are not many things that we can do, as the bill was

so quickly pushed through Congress. Nevertheless, a few allowances and compromises on behalf of both parties could solve the controversy more quickly than the situation is currently being handled. If the American people were simply to accept the USA Patriot Act for what it was intended to be, a protective device, then some turmoil would disappear. The bill has already passed through Congress and so it is quite difficult to change now. If the American public was to let the bill run its course and then expire soon as a result of the sunset clause, another controversy could be easily resolved because the bill would be exterminated in a few short years. Lastly, if the government were to promise the people that it would not take any measures to hinder Americans’ Constitutional rights in exchange for national security, then all sides of the issue could be successfully resolved.

The government is ultimately ruled by the people in a Democratic society such as that of the United States. The USA Patriot Act was formulated as a solution to quiet American cries as to why the government had not been able to prevent the September 11 attacks. However, if the American people and the government work together to achieve a peaceful medium ground on the USA Patriot Act issue, maximum satisfaction will be achieved. It is each person’s responsibility to take the initiative to become an active and correctly informed member of a democracy and that call is issued to all Americans now.

About Presidential Classroom

Since 1968, Presidential Classroom, a nonprofit, non-partisan, 501(c)3 civic education organization, has provided over 100,000 of the best and brightest high school students – from the United States and abroad – unprecedented access to the federal government and the people who shape public policy. Aimed at the high-achieving student, our programs are unique and challenging academic and leadership development experiences. Many PC Scholars mark their week in Washington as a turning point in the search for their future role in society.

Presidential Classroom Scholars must be high school juniors or seniors with a minimum 3.0 grade point average. Presidential Classroom programs include PC Scholars; Global Business & Public Policy; Media & Democracy; Science, Technology & Public Policy;

Future World Leaders Summit (international program); Law & Justice in a Democracy; and National Security in a Democracy.

Presidential Classroom is endorsed by the National Education Association, National Association of Secondary School Principals, Congressional Youth Award, National Society of High School Scholars and Who’s Who Among American High School Students. Through the assistance of leading corporations, foundations and individual donors, scholarship opportunities are available to exceptional students with financial need. About 60 percent of students receive financial assistance outside the family. Contributions are tax deductible as allowed by law. For more information about Presidential Classroom, visit our Web site at www.presidentialclassroom.org.

About the Caucus Method

Students in the Presidential Classroom program have a week to assemble and present their Current Issues Report. The timetable and process they use can be revised to fit your course schedule; in particular, the research portion is expandable.

Day 1:

a. The first day is critical. Students are grouped into “caucuses,” committees of 40 members charged with formulating a policy. Each caucus holds a brainstorming session to focus on potential Current Issues Report (CIR) topics. Students make lists of issues that interest them and rank them in order of preference.

b. A representative from each caucus brings its top five choices to a meeting. The representatives negotiate so that each group gets one of its top choices but no two caucuses have the same topic. Students establish a working environment for brainstorming, researching, debating, writing and presenting their CIRs.

Day 2:

The students’ CIRs are in the early stages of development. They begin to look at the scope of the topic, brainstorm possible resources and begin to refine their investigation. They may find that the issue has more than two sides. As a group, the caucus fleshes out a working definition of the topic and starts to rank the various ways people respond to the topic from the least to the most extreme. Students start to sort responses into pro and con categories.

Day 3:

Student leaders within each caucus help facilitate the division of labor for the CIR project. During the caucus meeting the members will decide who will do the general research for the CIR and who will write the speech/essay versions. This meeting is the last major brainstorming session for the

caucus at large, as the division of labor will have mini-groups within the caucus performing different tasks.

Day 4:

a. The research portion of the project includes as wide a variety of resources as possible. In addition to newspaper and magazine research, students are encouraged to interview (by phone or in person) representatives of various institutions to obtain primary-source material.

b. Students normally conduct a two- to three-minute oral briefing on their progress and the rest of the caucus gives feedback to set priorities. The group sets an agenda for Day 5.

Day 5:

Student CIRs are taking shape and include: 1) statement of the issue or problem; 2) problems surrounding the issue; 3) the argument(s) in favor of a particular policy; 4) the argument(s) against a particular policy; 5) their conclusion or prediction of how the issue will be resolved. Their goal is to stay on target to run a practice oral presentation in their meetings on Day 6.

Day 6:

In their caucus meetings, students perform a “dry run” of the oral presentation they will deliver on Day 7. The report cannot run for more than five minutes, and no more than five students from each caucus can deliver the presentation. After the dry run, students edit and finalize the CIR.

Day 7:

Students from each caucus give their CIR presentations to the student body. A question-and-answer period may take place after the presentation, or other students can submit questions that can be reviewed in the written summary. Students must ask or submit questions succinctly.

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