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N E W S R E L E A S E

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Students want U.S. to lead in global cooperation

In a recent national survey, many Nebraska high school students agreed that the guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy should be to help build a more cooperative world and combat global warming and other environmental challenges.

Nearly 500 students completed ballots as part of the 10th 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, Maryland, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Washington also participated in the 2008 Capitol Forum. Nationwide, 2,399 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, 67 percent of Nebraska respondents and 67 percent of national respondents identified as their first or second choice a future in which the United States would help bring the nations of the world together and play a leadership role in strengthening the United Nations' role in maintaining international security and responding to other global problems, including environmental pollution, financial crises, refugees and AIDS.

Among the four proposals, the most popular first choice in Nebraska (37 percent) and nationally (45 percent) was to give up a portion of our independent authority, or sovereignty, to the UN and offer our military, intelligence and economic support to UN-led initiatives. Students favored this policy even if it might "limit our ability to use military force unilaterally outside of North America." In 2007, this proposal ranked second in Nebraska and third nationally.

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

When Nebraska students were asked what foreign policy actions should be taken, they ranked as their first priority the negotiation of strict international standards to address global warming and other environmental threats (60 percent), a departure from their first priority in 2006 and 2007, which was to crack down on illegal immigration and adopt a policy to accept fewer immigrants. Nationally, setting environmental standards ranked first (62 percent) for the third consecutive year. Placing trade sanctions on countries that threaten their neighbors ranked second for students in Nebraska, while nationally students ranked the elimination of nuclear weapons second.

As part of the 2008 Capitol Forum, about 90 students and 22 teachers from high schools in Lincoln, Omaha, Bellevue, Ashland, Cambridge, Chadron, Dodge, Genoa, Hampton, Hastings,

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Hemingford, Holdrege, Howells, North Platte, Springfield, Stella, Sterling, Sumner, and Wilcox gathered March 31 at the State Capitol to debate the four options for the future of U.S. foreign policy. Afterwards, 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, Capitol Forum is funded in part by the Cooper Foundation, Milton and Miriam Waldbaum Family Foundation in memory of Miriam Waldbaum, Merrill Lynch, A to Z Printing, Anne Stuart Batchelder, and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

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

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***Editors: Complete national and Nebraska survey results are available at:
<http://www.choices.edu/cf/ballot.php>***