

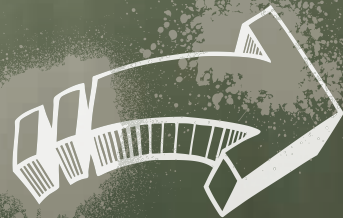
inTIME



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INSIDE

Why Speaking Up Matters—And How
You Can Make Your Voice Heard

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SET YOUR SITES ON GETTING INVOLVED

Technology is transforming the way young people connect with government.

"Kids had this bad reputation for not caring about politics," says Megan Busque, a 19-year-old student from East Lansing, Michigan. "But I think that's changed, and nothing could keep me from voting in 2008."

Busque isn't alone. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), more than one million additional Americans under age 25 voted in the 2008 presidential elections than in the 2004 elections. Youth turnout rose to 49% in 2008 for voters in the 18 to 24 age bracket. That's 13 percentage points higher than in 1996, which was the low point after decades of decline.

What's the reason for the change? Many point to advances in technology, which make it easier to get and stay involved, as an important factor. For example, Facebook, one of the most popular social-networking sites, has millions of members who average 20 minutes per day on-site as they explore interests and keep track of friends. Its 65 billion page views per month make Facebook perfect for rapidly spreading political news and generating excitement about government issues.

Chrissy Faessen knows about that kind of Internet power. She's deputy director of Rock the Vote, whose mission is to engage young people in politics. In 2008, Rock the Vote ran the largest voter-registration drive in history. It registered more than 2.6 million people by using Facebook and other tech tools like texting to help mobilize the youth vote.

"While not all young people have access to the Internet, many do have cell phones," Faessen told the U.S. Department of State during a Web chat. "We found connecting with young people through text messaging to be really effective."

Other organizations have learned similar lessons. College students can be tough to reach by regular mail because they move often and because they might not watch TV or read newspapers. So political groups—like the Young Republicans and the Young Democrats—use the Internet to connect with youth through YouTube, Twitter and e-mail.

Technology is also keeping young people involved beyond the ballot box. It's affecting the numbers who enter government service.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy used a still new technology for political communication: television. "Ask what you can do for your country," he said, inspiring a generation of leaders to enter national service.

Today President Barack Obama is reprising the call to service. "I will ask all Americans to make a renewed commitment to serving their community and their country," he announced. But rather than using television, he sent out his message primarily over the Internet, through millions of e-mails, hundreds of thousands of YouTube views and a special Website.

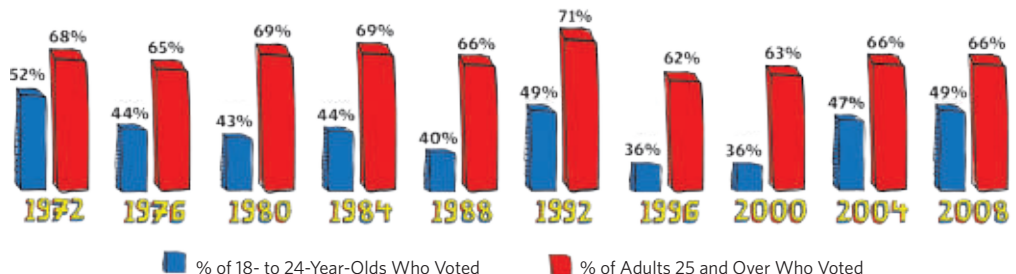
It's not just politicians—young people are harnessing the power of the Internet too. After two years examining the disconnect between politicians and young adults, teenager David Burstein launched the site 18 in '08 "to register, engage, and mobilize America's youth." Burstein told Politico: "There is a tendency to categorize our generation as obsessed with celebrities and video games. But more than ever, our generation wants to make a difference."

Think About It

What factors other than technology account for the recent increase in turnout among young voters?



TURNOUT of YOUNG VOTERS IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 1972 - 2008



Q: Why should I get involved in the political process, and what are the best ways to do so?

A: **U.S. Senator SUSAN COLLINS of Maine:** "As a U.S. Senator, I know that input from the people I represent is the most important guide to help me serve to the best of my ability. You should stay up-to-date on news regarding issues that are important to you, and write letters or send e-mails to your lawmakers to share your opinion with them. If you are 18 or older, you should exercise your right to vote. Finally, volunteering in your community will make you aware of the important issues in your area and give you the opportunity to improve your own leadership skills. Regardless of your age or where you live, you truly can make a difference."

Is Anybody Listening?

Many Americans, young and old, are skeptical of the political process. inTIME asked four legislators to respond to teens' questions about representative democracy.

Q: Politicians only listen to special-interest groups, don't they?

A: **U.S. Representative JOHN SPRATT of South Carolina:**

"It's true that voters do get organized and form special-interest groups to promote specific policy changes. But these groups are not evil, Darth Vader forces on Capitol Hill. Students, for example, are a special interest when

they seek better terms on their student loans. Homeowners are a special interest when they lobby for better mortgage rates.

Hospitals are a special interest when they ask for changes in health care policy. As legislators, we do listen to special-interest groups—but it's critical to remember that no single interest group represents a majority of voters."

Q: Don't elected officials do whatever they want most of the time? Are they actually accountable?

A: **JOE HACKNEY, Speaker of the House from North Carolina:**

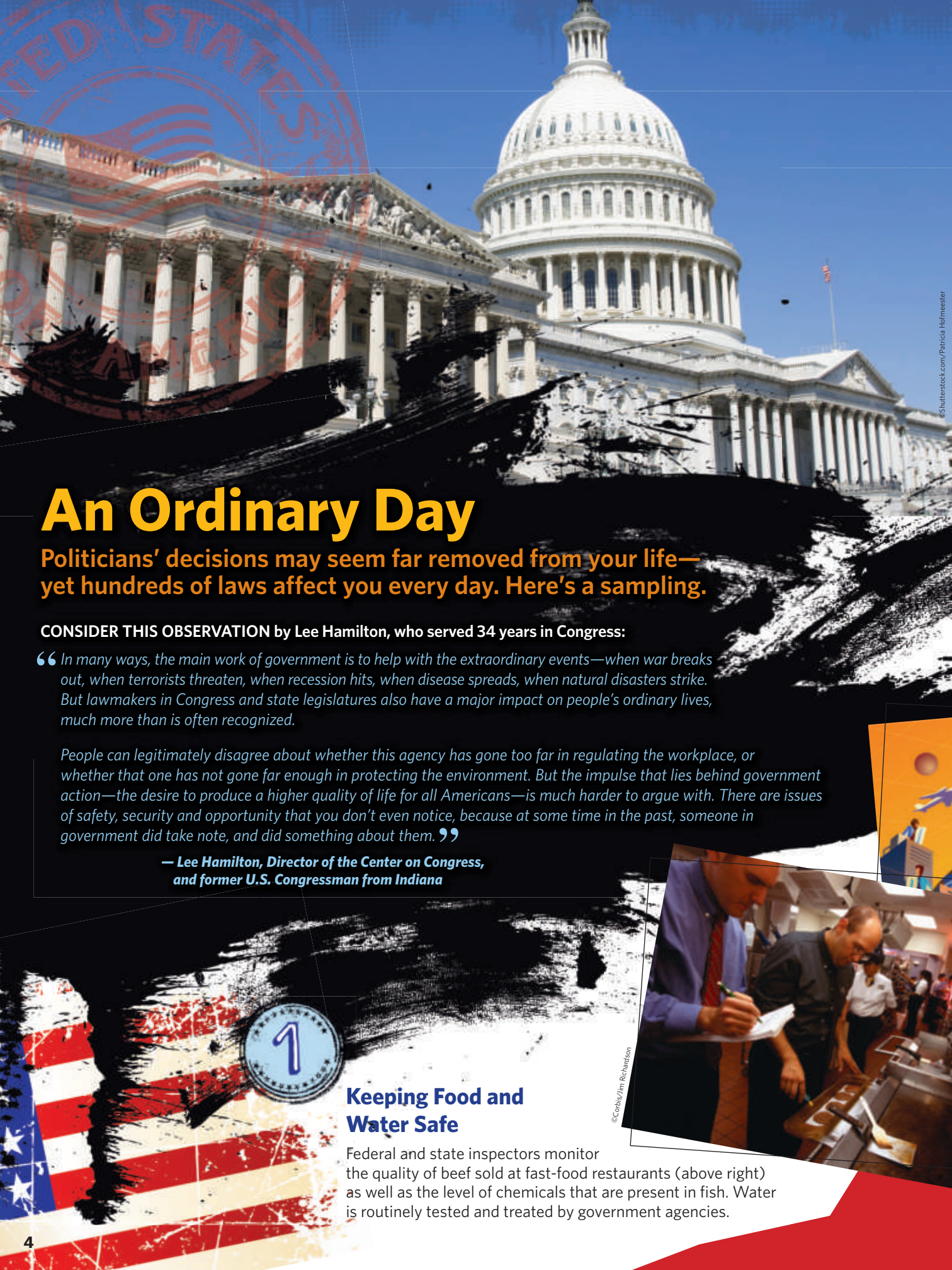
"Legislators are held highly accountable for the work we do, and rightfully so. I hear from my constituents regularly. I seek out their opinions and work hard to respond to their ideas. I run for reelection every two years, and if I am not doing my job, I may very well lose the election. The news media and organized interests keep a watch on what I do at the statehouse. My votes are recorded. Legislators' work is very public and always being examined."

Q: Doesn't compromise mean giving up your beliefs?

A: **ROSIE BERGER, State Representative from Wyoming:**

"As a freshman legislator, I proposed a piece of controversial legislation. I quickly learned the importance of collaborating with my fellow legislators and striving for common ground that would result in solid policy—all while satisfying the needs of my constituents. As a policy maker, most of the work I do involves compromise. In order to move legislation forward, it is essential to develop consensus among all stakeholders on an issue. This can be challenging because one needs to consider the expertise and values of others, the needs of their districts and the consequences of the legislation without losing its original intent. It is important to realize that as a group, legislators will have different points of view and there will be times we will not agree. But on many issues, with good information and cooperation we find common ground to move legislation forward that benefits the citizens we represent."

Experience this process first-hand through the Center on Congress's new Virtual Congress. Become an online member and join other students from across the country. Check out centeroncongress.org for more info.



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An Ordinary Day

Politicians' decisions may seem far removed from your life—yet hundreds of laws affect you every day. Here's a sampling.

CONSIDER THIS OBSERVATION by Lee Hamilton, who served 34 years in Congress:

“In many ways, the main work of government is to help with the extraordinary events—when war breaks out, when terrorists threaten, when recession hits, when disease spreads, when natural disasters strike. But lawmakers in Congress and state legislatures also have a major impact on people's ordinary lives, much more than is often recognized.

People can legitimately disagree about whether this agency has gone too far in regulating the workplace, or whether that one has not gone far enough in protecting the environment. But the impulse that lies behind government action—the desire to produce a higher quality of life for all Americans—is much harder to argue with. There are issues of safety, security and opportunity that you don't even notice, because at some time in the past, someone in government did take note, and did something about them.”

— Lee Hamilton, Director of the Center on Congress, and former U.S. Congressman from Indiana

Keeping Food and Water Safe

Federal and state inspectors monitor the quality of beef sold at fast-food restaurants (above right) as well as the level of chemicals that are present in fish. Water is routinely tested and treated by government agencies.

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A Revolution in Public Health

Until the 1950s, polio posed a huge threat to young people. In 1952, there were 21,000 polio cases in the United States. But thanks to the efforts of pioneering scientist Jonas Salk (left)—and laws that now require children to be vaccinated against polio—this threat has been largely eliminated.



©Corbis/Jim Richardson

On the Road



Twelve states and the District of Columbia have laws that ban text messaging while driving for all drivers; 10 states prohibit novice drivers (drivers with learner's permits or intermediate licenses) from texting. Forty-nine states require drivers to wear seat belts. Do you see these laws as prudent safety measures or an invasion of privacy?

Monitoring Your Money

The federal government recently provided hundreds of billions of dollars to help stabilize the banking system and is considering stronger oversight to help protect against downturns in the economy.

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New Challenges in Cyberspace

The Internet—which was developed through federal research—has led to new challenges for lawmakers. Federal and state legislators are looking for ways to heighten online privacy and security by fighting e-mail spam, online bullying, Internet ID theft and other electronic frauds.



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For Further Exploration

To learn more about government's impact on your everyday life, visit the Center on Congress at centeroncongress.org.

Click on the "Learn About Congress" link. Then select "The Impact of Congress" within "Interactive Learning Modules."

Think About It

Lee Hamilton argues that "There are issues of safety, security and opportunity that you don't even notice, because at some time in the past, someone in government did take note, and did something about them." Do you agree? How conscious are you of the laws highlighted on these pages? In what other ways does government affect your daily life?



"If we could do this, any kids can do it. We're no different."

—Glenda Gilles

Their Ideas Count!

These young people are making their voices heard—and having an impact on the political process

TACKLING A COMMUNITY PROBLEM

When students in Hialeah, Florida, discovered a problem in their community, they did more than just gripe about it. They proposed a new law to address the situation—and they got the law passed.

"We realized that there were drug dealers near our school and parks," explains Glenda Gilles. "And we felt we had to do something about it."

To document the scope of the problem, Glenda and the other members of her civics class surveyed 367 teenagers. Of the teens who were questioned, 209 reported that they had been offered drugs in or near a public school or park.

The students then proposed legislation that would expand the drug-free zone around any public facility in Florida from 200 to 1,000 feet. They also lobbied for an automatic three-year sentence for anyone convicted of selling drugs within the zone.

To generate support for their legislation, the students used a strategy suggested by Project Citizen, a national civics education program: They teamed up with their State Representative, René Garcia, who says he was "amazed" by the students' persistence. They prepared

PowerPoint presentations, mailed letters to the governor and the 160 members of the state legislature, sent hundreds of e-mails, and followed up with phone calls. "If someone didn't respond, we kept calling and writing," says class member Alexandra Montesino.

After two years of lobbying—including a trip to the state capital, where they met with lawmakers—the students' bill passed both the Florida House and Senate. Signed into law by Florida's governor, Senate Bill 1588 proved that creative thinking and perseverance can really pay off.



A TRIUMPH FOR STUDENTS: THESE TEENS IN FLORIDA SUCCEEDED IN GETTING AN IMPORTANT LAW PASSED.

"Even kids under 18 have power and influence, because people running for office know that we are the future voters."

—Elias Quijano



DEMOCRACY IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Want to find out more about what it's like to serve as an elected official in our republic—the debate, negotiation and compromise that are the fabric of representative democracy? Take part in **America's Legislators Back to School Program**. This annual event provides a forum for state legislators all across the country to meet

personally with young constituents and to answer questions, share ideas, listen to concerns and impart a greater understanding of the legislative process. The Back to School Program starts the third week of September and runs throughout the school year. To learn how your school can participate, visit ncsl.org/backtoschool.



BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE IN YOUR STATE

"It's really important that we have a voice in our future," says Alex Jonlin, a 15-year-old from Seattle, Washington.

How can students find their voice in government? One way is through a Legislative Youth Advisory Council. These special councils composed of young members help create policies and programs that can change the politics of tomorrow.

The first youth advisory council was established by the state of Maine in 2002. Its purpose was to directly connect young people with the state legislature and to examine issues of importance to youth—like education and employment. For instance, Maine's youth council proposed a bill that allows 16-year-olds to preregister to vote.

At least 10 other states have created legislative youth advisory councils, including Alabama, Colorado, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota and Washington.

The idea for the youth council in Washington State started with Alex Jonlin. "In 2005, when I was 12, I talked with my legislator, Senator Ken Jacobsen, about finding a way for youth to have a voice in government," Jonlin says. "I went to testify at hearings, and the youth advisory council was created."

Washington's advisory council consists of 22 members from around the state who, at the time of appointment, are ages 14 to 18. Members serve two-year terms and, if eligible, may be reappointed for subsequent two-year terms.

Jonlin knows that the legislative process can often be about compromise. "While the bill to create the council was going through the legislature, an amendment was put on that established a minimum age," Jonlin recounts. "So I wasn't able to be on the council for a couple years."

Now on the council, Jonlin and the other members advise the Washington State Legislature on legislation and issues—such as changes to driver licenses and high school drop-out prevention.

Tucker Cholvin, a member of Washington's youth council, believes young people helping with issues like education makes a lot of sense. "I think you'll have the best results with issues related to students when you get input from students themselves," Cholvin says. "After all, who knows better how to solve educational problem than students who go to school every day?"

"It's all about compromising, but without compromising your values."

—Stephanie Vis



**Getting Connected:
Sites to Check Out**

indiana.edu/~ythvoice

youthnoise.com

declareyourself.com

kidsvotingusa.org

youthvote.org

rockthevote.org

genvote.org

WHAT CAN LEGISLATIVE YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCILS DO?

The role of the youth advisory councils and their connection with their legislatures differs from state to state, but here are some of their duties:

- Provide advice or recommendations on pending legislation
- Hold public hearings
- Solicit input from peers
- Provide testimony
- Propose legislation
- Submit an annual report of activities



Take a Stand

State and federal lawmakers are debating proposals that affect you. Let them know what you think.



SHOULD MORE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS BE BUILT TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS?

Today, nuclear power provides 20% of our country's electricity and produces no carbon emissions. If we got 80% of our electricity from nuclear power plants (as France does) we would emit nearly a third less carbon. That would be the greenhouse gas equivalent of taking all of our cars off the road.

We could potentially free ourselves from fossil fuels that are hurting the planet and our dependence on oil-producing countries. And nuclear power is more reliable than solar and wind, which are intermittent electricity sources.

Then why hasn't a new nuclear power plant opened in the United States since 1996? Many point to safety concerns or the fact that we still don't have a long-term method for the disposal of atomic waste.

Those same people often argue that the federal government hasn't met its responsibility to store nuclear waste, despite pouring billions of dollars into the Yucca Mountain disposal site in Nevada. And while the nuclear power industry is doing a better job of storing its radioactive waste at its plants, most Americans don't want dangerous, radioactive waste in their state.

Plus, opponents point out that although the plants may be inexpensive to operate, they are unbelievably costly to build. Price estimates for new plants have tripled recently. And the energy they produce might not be the cheapest. One recent study priced new nuclear generation at 25 to 30 cents per kilowatt-hour; new wind power comes in around seven cents, which is about the same as coal.

Still, thanks to the climate crisis, states are devising creative incentives for new plants. For example, Florida has promised to pay utilities for nuclear investments even if they never complete any reactors, and may allow nuclear power to qualify for renewable energy subsidies—even though it's not renewable.

A recent Gallup poll found that 59% of Americans support atomic power. What do you think? Can other arguments be made for and against building more nuclear plants? Debate this as a class. Then flex your political muscle by taking one or more of the steps listed at right.

You Can't Always Get What You Want...

Because there are many good ideas and a lot of competing interests, you may not always win when you try to change public policy. As Leticia Van de Putte, State Senator from Texas, says, "There is a vast diversity of opinion on the issues that affect our lives. Your concerns and ideas do matter to legislators. Your voice will be heard."

SHOULD TEEN DRIVERS BE RESTRICTED?

Did you know that 3,174 15-to-20-year-old drivers were killed and an additional 252,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes in 2007? Or that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people in this age group? These are among the statistics cited by state lawmakers who favor restrictions on teen drivers.

Every state has enacted some form of law to make it more difficult for teens to obtain driver's licenses. Usually referred to as graduated driver's licensing (GDL), the laws provide a gradual process for teen drivers to gain experience in a safe, educational environment.

Forty-nine states have an intermediate licensing stage within their GDL, with passenger and nighttime driving restrictions. For example, Idaho has a nighttime driving restriction that prohibits people with intermediate licenses from driving after sunset.

What do you think of these laws? Is legislation to restrict teen driving pending in your state? Do some research to find out. Then share your views on this issue with your state senator and representative.



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WAYS TO FLEX YOUR POLITICAL MUSCLE

1. Dear Senator...

Politicians know that their jobs depend on listening to constituents. Visit votesmart.org to find the names and addresses of leaders in Congress and in your state legislature who represent you. Then let them know what's on your mind!

2. Organize

Get your friends together and start a group at school, in your community or on the Web that deals with issues you care about.

3. Make the news—and get informed

Alert your local representative to issues in your school or community that need his or her attention. Alert local media, too. And devour newspapers, magazines, books and Websites. The more you know about the issues, the better your arguments will be—and the more likely you are to get involved.

4. Change the rules

Tired of being told "no"? It's your country, too. Go to youthrights.org to find ways to speak out on issues you may disagree with, such as voting age, driving restrictions and curfew laws.

5. Vote

There's only one way to oust a politician you DON'T like: Elect one you DO like! Or, if you're under 18, work to get others registered.

Sources: National Conference of State Legislatures; Center on Congress; youthnoise.com



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