

## **Debating the Six Big Ideas in America Today (45 minutes for preparation and 45 minutes to implement)**

More than 220 years after the ratification of the Constitution, the Six Big Ideas still inspire debate. Different understandings of how the Big Ideas should be manifested in the actions of the federal government often engender debates over what government should be doing in the name of the people it serves. You will obtain an understanding of these current disputes by taking sides in a debate featuring current issues.

### ***The Debate Format:***

- Students will be assigned one of the scenarios described below. One team will argue for Position A and the other will argue for Position B.
- Each participant will speak for no more than two minutes at a time and teams will alternate speakers if and when possible. Students can use [Handout 4](#) to plan the arguments to be made during the debate. Try to anticipate and respond to the arguments that could be made by the opposing team.
- You can use your copies of the Constitution, research from reputable sources online and textbooks to support your arguments and to come up with examples illustrating your position.

### ***The Debate Questions:***

1. The idea: Limited Government

Question: To what extent should the federal government be involved in economic issues?

- Position A: The federal government's powers over taxation as well as international and interstate trade allow significant latitude in directing economic policy.
- Position B: The federal government should only act to remedy unfavorable economic conditions for business activity.

2. The idea: Republicanism

Question: What should be the role of citizens in creating public policy?

- Position A: Public policy should reflect the opinion of voters.
- Position B: Public policy should be created by officials who are most informed about the issues involved.

3. The idea: Checks and Balances

Question: When the President makes a nomination, what should be the nature of the Senate's "advice and consent?"

- Position A: The Senate should defer to the President's choice of who he wants working under him.
- Position B: It is the Senate's duty to make an independent judgment of a nominee's suitability for a position serving the American people, even if that means denying the President his choice.

4. The idea: Federalism

Question: How should power be divided between the federal government and the states?

- Position A: The Federal government should retain the most power because it is best positioned to insure fair treatment, safety and equal protection for all Americans.
- Position B: The states should retain the most power because they are closer to the people, better informed on local issues and best positioned to exercise authority for their residents.

5. The idea: Separation of Powers

Question: Once Congress declares war and the President assumes the role of Commander-in-Chief who decides how the war ends?

- Position A: Congress, the policy making branch which represents the people, should determine peace terms.
- Position B: The President as Commander-in-Chief is in the best position to determine appropriate actions.

6. The idea: Popular Sovereignty

Question: Should voter ballot initiatives be allowed to overturn laws passed by legislative bodies?

- Position A: Yes; ballot initiatives allow voters to directly participate in their government.
- Position B: No; voters already express their views through election of public officials.