

# ELECTIONS, CANDIDATES, AND FAMILY ISSUES<sup>1</sup>

by Steven Wisensale  
University of Connecticut

## PURPOSE OF THE ASSIGNMENT

To become familiar with using the Web to become informed about the political views, funding sources, and voting records of selected legislators in the U.S. Congress. Complete all 20 steps and submit this form.

## DIRECTIONS

Name of state assigned to you: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Go to Project Vote Smart at <http://www.vote-smart.org/>
2. Click on “My State”
3. Then click on “State Facts”
4. Select your state.
5. Read the summary about your state.
6. Return to the home page and click on “U.S. Congress” which is listed under “Current Officials” at the top of the page.
7. Name the two Senators of the state assigned to you and identify their parties. Click on each senator’s name for more information about them. Circle the name of the Senator or Senators up for re-election this year. If not up for re-election, place the date of their next election in the third column below:

Senator: \_\_\_\_\_ Party: \_\_\_\_\_ Election Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Senator: \_\_\_\_\_ Party: \_\_\_\_\_ Election Year: \_\_\_\_\_

8. How many members in the U.S. House of Representatives from your state?  
Number of Republicans? \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Democrats? \_\_\_\_\_  
Any Independents? If so, how many? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How many electoral votes does your state have? \_\_\_\_\_
10. If one of your Senators is up for re-election, click on his or her site. If both are up for election (very unlikely), click on one of them (your choice). If neither is up for election, choose one and click on his or her site.
11. Then click on “Biographical” and read about the background of your Senator.
12. How many committees does your Senator serve on? \_\_\_\_\_ Is he/she the chair of any committees? If so, which ones?  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Return to your Senator’s main page and click on “Issues Positions (NPAT)”
14. Then click on two issues (Abortion and Education). In a brief paragraph, summarize your Senator’s position on these two issues. If you don’t understand some terms or issues, raise questions in class.

---

---

---

---

<sup>1</sup> Note. “Elections, Candidates, and Family Issues.” by Steven Wisensale. Reprinted with permission.

15. Then, still on the same page (“Issues Positions NPAT”) click on “Legislative Priorities” (at the end of the list) and summarize below your Senator’s priorities. Is there anything related at all to families and children?

---

---

---

---

16. Then click on “Campaign Finances.” Review the information there, particularly under the categories at the top left (“Total Raised,” “Geographic Totals,” “Sector Totals,” the “Top Industries” and “Top Contributors”). Play around a bit at this site, but definitely click on “List PAC Contributions.” A PAC is a Political Action Committee that gives funds to a legislator and expects the legislator to vote in support of the PAC’s interests.

17. Who are the major PAC contributors for your Senator? Not by specific names but by major categories. List the top 3 categories and the total \$\$ amounts under each category.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

18. Now return to previous page. At top right are listed “Current Committee Assignments.” Do you see any connection between PAC contributions and committee assignments? If so, explain.

---

---

---

---

19. If you lived in the state assigned to you, would you vote for the Senator you just reviewed if he/she was up for election? Explain.

---

---

---

---

## TEACHING NOTE

This exercise was created for a class of 50 students, thus all states were covered. Although the focus was on U.S. Senators, the assignment could be adjusted so that half the class study Senators and the other half focus on selected members of the House of Representatives. This assignment can be particularly interesting during an election year and certainly during the fall term.