



How to Influence America's Future

Senator Heidi Heitkamp Study Group Outline

The study group will meet five times in the Fall 2020 semester. Meeting dates are September 30, October 7, 14, 21, and 28. All meetings will take place from 1 p.m.-2:30 p.m. over Zoom.

Senator Heidi Heitkamp served in the U.S. Senate from 2013 to 2019, the first female senator to be elected from the state of North Dakota. She also served extensively in state-level government as the state's tax commissioner and attorney general and, most recently, founded the One Country Project, an organization focused on addressing the needs and concerns of rural America. Her study group will push students to ask complex questions about America's global status and America's position on global issues like climate change. She will bring to the conversation a deep understanding of politics in a state that voted for Donald Trump by a margin of roughly 30 percentage points.

Goal: The goal for this Study Group is to engage students in a discussion of long-term American structural issues and to encourage fact-based planning and decision making to meet these challenges.

Structure:

- One week before each study group Sen. Heitkamp will provide a pdf of the Data First points. Students who want to prepare for the discussion (**totally optional**) should review the Data First points and look for articles or opinions with which they do not agree but are, to them, nevertheless persuasive. For example, a Data Point in the first study group is income inequality. If a student believes that income inequality is one of the great moral and political issues of our time, what could that student learn by reading the November 30 edition of *The Economist* titled, "Inequality illusions: Why wealth and income gaps are not what they appear?". Nothing needs to be written, just come ready to discuss.
- In the first 10-15 minutes of the Study Group, we will discuss the data.
- For the next 15-50 minutes we will discuss the topic of the session and why it is or isn't important to America's future.
- The remainder of the time will be spent in Questions and Answers on any topic the students want to bring up.

September 30

Session One: What does it mean to be an American? *(I know that anyone living in the Western Hemisphere can be called an "American" but please allow me this short cut).*

Data First: Who are we?

- OK Boomers: America is getting older
- Minority Majority...Nation of immigrants
- Debtor Nation: Historical levels of Individual and National Debt
- The haves and the have nots: Expanding wealth and income disparity
- The Best and the Brightest in the world?
- Innovators

We will discuss the possibility that we are politically polarized because we are increasingly unable to agree on a unifying American identity. The irony is that at a time when we see political focus on "America First" we are more divided than ever on what it means to be an American. Those attending this session might legitimately ask "Why does it matter?" or "Is this really a new problem?"

October 7

Session Two: Is the age of America's global dominance coming to an end?

Data First: Who is rest of the world?

- Population percentages
- Marketplaces of innovation
- Emerging global middle class and gender equality
- Remarkable growth in literacy
- Dramatic global increase in access to technology

Despite turmoil across the globe, the indisputable trend is that the rest of the world continues to develop its economic and political infrastructure and arguably can be economically successful without engaging with, or being dependent on, the United States. We will discuss the consequence of America's disengagement from, and criticism of, global institutions, our unreliability as a trading partner, and our retreat from moral global leadership. What does this mean to the future of the United States? And what about China?

October 14

Session Three: What must America do domestically to "win" globally?

Data First: What are America's advantages?

- First class Universities
- Educated population
- Commitment to research
- Dominated by the Middle Class
- A nation of immigrants
- Commitment to diversity and tolerance

- Access to capital
- Democracy and rule of law in our country and the world
- Support of global trade
- Commitment to a strong military

The elements that were essential for securing a dominant role for America in the global world order are being challenged today from both the right and the left. We will discuss why maintaining a vital middle class is essential to global competition. Also important to this discussion is exploring what is meant by “winning.”

October 21

Session Four: Is American leadership on global challenges essential to America’s future?

Data First: What are the most serious challenges to global world order?

- Climate change
- Pandemic
- Cyber threats
- Biological warfare
- Emerging hostile nation states
- Politically divided America

We live in a global economy, and like it or not, America’s future success is dependent on global engagement. Since the aftermath of World War II, the world economic order has benefited from America’s willingness to invest in securing and maintaining world peace and international cooperation on global issues. In the past we might have been able to isolate the United States from conflicts outside our borders. Today America and the World’s most serious challenges cannot be solved by “Going it Alone” or “My Way or the Highway” policies.

October 28

Session Five: Can America get its house in order?

Data First: Why can’t the simplest of things get done?

- Regional polarization
- Gender polarization
- Racial polarization
- Base strategies
- Campaign finance

Is it time to reform the electoral college, eliminate the senate filibuster rule, impose term limits for federal politicians and supreme court justices, and publicly fund campaigns? Will these reforms improve our government or lead to an ungovernable country and widen the political divide?