



Harvard Model Congress Boston 2024

GUIDE TO THE WEST WING

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INTRODUCTION



The Oval Office, a prominent feature of the West Wing.

NPR

As Harvard Model Congress Boston 2024 begins, we will be entering the last year of the president's time in office. With the 2024 election fast approaching, the president and the congressional parties need to act in order to make sure they have the support they need heading into a crucial election season. The president must achieve political successes in order to gain support for his candidacy in 2024.

As members of the West Wing 2024, you will have the ability to shape and define your parties' policies and platforms at this pivotal point in time. For those representing the party of the president (DNC), you will have the responsibility of crafting a party platform that will help you keep the Oval Office in 2024. As for members of the RNC, you must also create a party platform, but yours must attract those who are ambivalent about the president and enable your party to retake the White House in 2024.

Each side will craft a platform, a strategy, and campaign materials on five key political issues: climate change, healthcare expenditure, data and privacy, the future of the workforce, and US-Turkey relations. Following the creation of the platform, you will have the opportunity to lobby your respective positions to different committees across Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Presidential Cabinet.

Through your advocacy, you will testify for your respective party to vote and approach the aforementioned issues to the best of their ability. You will then be responsible for representing and nominating a party nominee for the general election, fielded from a wide range of prospective candidates for the 2024 election. With your chosen nominee, you will undergo multiple debates in the West Wing.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WEST WING

The White House has not always been the stunning symbol of power and democracy that is today. The White House staff was initially very small, consisting of one or two people whose salaries were paid directly by the president. For much of the 18th and 19th centuries, presidents personally supervised all White House operations, even answering the telephone and opening mail. An official White House secretary was not hired until Congress appropriated \$2,500 for the position in 1857.

Over the course of the 19th century, the White House became overcrowded and could not meet the needs of a growing executive. The cramped second floor accommodated the presidential living quarters and the 13-person executive office, as well as guests. In 1902, Theodore Roosevelt responded to the overcrowding by ordering the construction of annexes to the East and West sides. The East annex was intended for receiving guests, including the public, while the West addition provided a wing entirely devoted to executive workspace. Roosevelt succeeded in keeping the residence and office of the president in the same building. William Howard Taft authorized construction of the first Oval Office in 1929, but more changes were yet to come.

The foundation for the modern executive was laid in 1939, after Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal greatly expanded the reach of federal governmental policies and required a growing number of people to perform ordinary governmental functions. Consequently, the Brownlow Commission, a panel of political scientists and public administration experts appointed by President Roosevelt, issued a report that boldly and clearly asserted, "The President needs help." Roosevelt's New Deal greatly expanded the reach of federal government policies and required a growing number of people to execute it.

Congress responded by approving the creation of the Executive Office of the President (EOP), composed of the White House Office and the precursor of the Office of Management and Budget. This act doubled the size of the executive branch and served as the basis for the complex organization that is the modern White House.

THE WEST WING TODAY

From humble beginnings, the Executive Office of the President now employs about 1,800 staffers. Though a subunit of the EOP, the White House Office (WHO) is the core of the presidential staff. The WHO is composed of the closest advisors to the president, numbering about 430 people. His closest advisors work in the West

Wing of the White House, while the rest serve in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and other adjacent buildings. The president has great discretion in organizing the staff and functions of the WHO, causing many observers to remark that the White House reinvents itself with every administration. The president determines the creation of positions, the allocation of responsibilities, the chain of command, and how and from whom he receives information and advice.



The Eisenhower Executive Office Building

Although the organization may vary greatly from administration to administration, there are some constants. Most presidents have a team of WHO staff to deal with congressional affairs, political affairs, foreign policy, the economy, domestic policy, speechwriting, communications, the Cabinet, interest groups, presidential appointments, and advanced work. All presidents rely heavily on their staff for information and advice and to complete the considerable administrative work of the office.

Today, the West Wing of the White House is a vibrant hub of executive activity. It is crowded with small offices available to only the president's core staffers and their assistants. Although the adjacent Eisenhower Executive Office Building offers grand, well-appointed workspaces, you cherish the cramped West Wing quarters in closest proximity to perhaps the most powerful man in the world. If you are in the RNC, you will cling to the hope that you will be working there following the next election.

The West Wing is perpetually active, as a president's work is never done. Advisors help the president set his agenda, formulate policy, write speeches, persuade legislators, brief the press, meet with diplomats, and monitor national security threats—all within a two-story wing.

Unmatched Responsibility

The honor of working here carries with it unmatched responsibility. The activity of several hundred dedicated and capable professionals is necessary for one simple reason: it is in the West Wing that presidents make decisions that change the world and formulate history. The president must rely heavily on the expertise, talents, and judgment of his top advisors in order to accomplish anything.

The tasks that must be completed to fulfill the president's charge are nearly endless. White House staffers advise the president on every major domestic policy area including the economy, domestic security, the environment, health care, and education, in addition to monitoring foreign relations with every nation in the world. They help him set his agenda and then consider policies from every angle, taking into consideration practical as well as political consequences.

Political Persuasion

As they consider policy questions ranging from what should be done to increase gross domestic product (GDP) growth to the best means for encouraging democracy in the Middle East, staffers also monitor political concerns. This includes challenges such as persuading Congress, preparing speeches for the American people, and organizing public appearances.

Once the president has settled on his priorities and the appropriate course of action, members of his White House Office must persuade the public, Congress, and the Cabinet to execute the decisions. This is no small task. Just as the Founders envisioned, the president is the energizing force in the republic, but he cannot do it alone—he needs your help to enlist the support of the legislature and the entire executive branch.

Staffers must find a way to appease Congress, the courts, interest groups, government agencies, departments, and other nations, even when these groups are in opposition to one another. As a result, the White House is overcome each day with a workload that forces every staffer to push forward at full speed in order to stay ahead of the curve.

Of course, while staying on top of day-to-day concerns, advisors must also keep an eye on the big picture. A president is judged by his ability to implement his agenda. Staffers must keep him focused on his long-term priorities while working each day to achieve them. For this reason below is a list of issues parties must keep in mind for the upcoming election cycle. These issues will be discussed in some committees, and will have major weight in deciding the election's outcome.



*The DNC Headquarters
in Washington, D.C.*

Axios

THE ISSUES

Issue 1: Natural Climate Solutions

Climate change continues to be one of the greatest issues of our generation. However, even with recent efforts to limit emissions and increase the use of clean energy sources, the risk of drastic climate change remains. A recent solution proposed is to utilize “Natural climate solutions”, which use “natural” carbon-removing methods to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The 2021 Growing Climate Solutions Act authorizes the Department of Agriculture to have jurisdiction over incentives for reducing emissions and subsidizing farmers utilizing sustainable practices. Furthermore, in 2022, President Biden issued an executive order that creates a task force with the sole focus on the identification of strategies of natural climate solutions.

Creating natural climate solutions enables the creation of income opportunities for landowners in states rich with natural climate solutions. Furthermore, creating natural climate solutions provides an additional—and potentially more efficient—way to lower carbon emissions due to their being administered by the USDA rather than Congress itself.

In order to have a measure on the efficacy of subsidizing natural climate solutions, there must be a way to measure reductions in carbon emissions in response to the implementation of such policies. Organizations like Third Party Verifiers are tasked with this measurement, but if their measurements are inaccurate, then subsidizing the creation of natural climate solutions would be void. Furthermore, the creation of these entities is expensive, which means that delegates should consider this when supporting Natural Climate Solutions.

For Conservatives, the viability of climate change being a major issue is often debated. As a result, spending money to support a potential solution to the problem would seem to cause more of an economic burden than national success. For Liberals, there is almost no debate that human-created climate change is a tremendous issue. However, there is debate on the extent members of Congress are willing to support regulation on the environment, including in the case of Natural Climate Change. For members extremely focused on the environment, natural climate is still debated due to debates regarding its long-term efficacy.

Environmental interest groups typically tending to be more liberal, tend to be very supportive of natural climate solutions. However, these groups might overstate the positive impact of natural climate solutions.



*The Republican National
Convention in 2016*
ABC News

*Briefing Referenced: Natural Climate Solutions and Biological
Carbon Offsets, by Blake Koerber*

Issue 2: Gene Editing

In 2009, it was realized that CRISPR-Cas9, a manipulation of the traditional bacterial defense against viruses, could be used to edit the genomes of a wide variety of organisms—including plants and animals. CRISPR has been used for various applications in the medical and agricultural spheres, but with its use, questions have been raised regarding the regulation of such powerful technology. Particularly, should such technology be used in humans? If so, to what extent?

Currently, the consensus reached seems to not allow CRISPR edits that can last multiple generations, or heritable gene edits. This means that edits to the human embryo have been strictly banned in congress. However, CRISPR use to treat diseases are currently

allowed and active included in several clinical trials. However, the line between using CRISPR for clinical purposes and therapeutic enhancement is quite blurry, and who decides this delineation is also predominantly undecided. Furthermore, the only legislation existing on the issue is the Consolidated Appropriation Act of 2026, which bans FDA approval of embryo gene editing. Also passed in 2016, the Natural Bioengineered Food Law allows the USDA to create a mandatory disclosure for gene-edited foods. Lastly, another government entity, the NIH declared that they will not fund research in gene-edited technologies. Therefore, the problem of the regulation has been solved by creating legislation to pass the baton to other bureaucratic entities.

There are many arguments in favor of delineating responsibility to specific governing bodies. There have been thoughts to establish an oversight committee on gene editing to specifically monitor progress in genetic research and advise on appropriate regulations. There is also the possibility of creating interagency gene-editing working group to ensure proper coordination in regulations between bureaucratic agencies.

However, again, there is the question brought up as to if this is the best form of regulation of genetic modifications. Conservatives often argue that decisions over jurisdiction should be left up to the states, while liberals might want such decisions to be left up to the federal government.

Briefing Referenced: Gene Editing by Conrad Hock

Issue 3: Homelessness

In the United States, approximately 500,000 people are considered homeless, a number that is increasing with time. The United States has failed to solve such an issue, allowing stigma to permeate and a continuous cycle of poverty to become further entrenched in American communities. Furthermore, homeless populations tend to target specific non-white individuals and those that have a substance use conditions, evidencing the structural nature of the U.S. Homelessness epidemic. To date, the government has created multiple interventions to aid in this issue. There are government-run shelters. There are programs like housing vouchers, which help individuals find housing. There are also welfare programs, such as Medicaid to subsidize healthcare for low-income individuals or SNAP.

Welfare solutions, such as the ones listed above, have enabled safer and improved conditions for many individuals. This is obviously a positive outcome, as the government is stepping in to solve a tremendous issue. However, many solutions, such as government-run shelters, are a short term fix, providing someone a

bed for a single night rather than a path forward away from the cycle of poverty. Other targeted approaches, like job training and increasing minimum wage, are often suggested as a more systemic fix rather than a “bandaid” option. As evidenced, the main debate on this issue is what is the better solution: providing an immediate—albeit short-term—“home” to someone or attempting to fix the a potential cause of homelessness.

As a whole, conservatives tend to focus on individual success rather than government intervention. Therefore, they might focus on providing job training to allow a homeless person to support themselves rather than providing a government-paid service to a homeless individual. However, liberals tend to focus on providing government-run programs like shelters and health care coverage to help aid individuals overcome structural barriers that contribute to homelessness.

Briefing Referenced: Homelessness: The Economics and Solutions by Jay Garg

Issue 4: Social Media and Domestic Terrorism

After the January 6th Insurrection at the United States Capital, concerns for both the United States Democracy and rise of domestic terrorism has been at forefront of many Americans’ minds. However, this event also represents the rapid spread of extremism amongst youth, a diffusion that has largely been facilitated by social media. As a result, many questions have been raised regarding the regulation of social media, and if increased regulation occurs, what that will mean for the American guarantee of free speech. Recently, Congress has proposed legislation on free speech. The House recently introduced Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act, which would allow the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice to coordinate on domestic terrorism, but this piece of legislation stalled in the Senate. However, more instrumental is the role of outside stakeholders to online administration. The Global Internet forum to Counter Terrorism includes many major social media companies, and have united to create a database to share extremist content.

Those in favor of further moderating social media content seem to believe that it will stop the spread of extremist sentiments and decrease the likelihood of another domestic terrorist event. Furthermore, if the tremendous stakeholder role was united with government regulation, then public-private partnerships might be able to further research the proliferation of extremism on social media.

On the other hand, with increased regulation of open dialogue online platforms, there are concerns raised about the legitimacy of



*The RNC was hosted in 2020
on the White House Lawn
Rolling Stone*

free speech in such legislation. As a result, there is a delicate middle ground that must be reached that balances free speech and content moderation.

Conservatives often end to shy away from intense regulation, especially as it pertains to free speech. Furthermore, conservatives often tend to think that censored media often results in consequences for conservative-leading groups, so greater regulation would

Issue 5: Generative AI

In the past few years, the rise of ChatGPT has accompanied the introduction of many questions about the ethical usage of Generative AI technologies. Generative AI, being so new, lacks regulation regarding when it should be used and how—or if—it fits into existing copyright and patent laws. Furthermore, the larger question of generative AI is how do we regulate such a new and unknown technology?

In 2020, Congress passed the National Artificial Intelligence Act, which helped ensure appropriate development of AI. This act supported research and education on AI, as well as a Select Committee on AI. However, the matter of regulating AI has not been taken on by Congress due its new nature.

There have many proposed options to regulate AI such as extending copyrights to AI-generated work, restricting the development of AI, or creating a specific federal agency to regulate AI. With such a newly developing technology, such entities would allow that the United States responsibly tackles AI development rather than it becoming a problem in the future. On the side of potentially decreased regulation, there have been discussions about creating a privacy tack force to ensure that AI users have the right to privacy in their use.

Conservatives tend to support research and development of AI, especially as it pertains to its use in law enforcement. However, conservatives place a priority it protecting jobs to maintain a stable economy, which would be in favor of increased regulation on AI. In terms of the liberal view on AI and its regulation, liberals tend to think of AI to increase economic output rather than competing for jobs. Liberals tend to see AI and its development as a way to grow the economy to achieve a more universalized income, supporting the growth of AI technologies.

Powerful interest groups such as Chat GPT or other AI-related technological companies are very much in favor of the less-restricted development of AI technologies. Additionally, the role of generative AI in education is quickly becoming a question in academic

institutions but this issue has yet to make a strong appearance in Congress.

Briefing Referenced: Regulating Generative AI by Andrew Zonneveld

BEFORE THE CONFERENCE

Know the Issues

In order to succeed in campaigning, each delegate must know the issues. Research the position your party will have, and practice arguing for your position with a friend, teacher, or fellow delegate. Likewise, it will be important to also research the stance of the opposition: by anticipating your competitor's strengths and weaknesses, you and your team can craft a better argument and counterargument on the issues and will therefore be better equipped for victory at HMC 2024.

Knowing these arguments well begins with research. Look for House and Senate briefings on the issues that may include helpful information to begin researching your party's position (there is at least one briefing per issue). Your candidates will have to effectively communicate to voters as a representative of your party, and your team will need to be prepared to convince audiences that your stance matters. Expect to submit a brief write-up of your anticipated policy position (a paragraph per issue, minimum) to your chairs in the weeks leading up to the conference.

Know the Parties

Each campaign team member will also need to delve deeper into both parties' history on the issues and general political strategy, using the information in this briefing as a starting point. Information on key politicians involved in your party may also be useful to you throughout the course of the conference.

AT THE CONFERENCE

Each party team will have opportunities to employ their own creative strategies and plan additional activities for increasing their platforms' appeal to the voters. Like actual campaigns, the experience at HMC will be busy and intense as sides compete to reach voters and run a winning campaign. Campaigns should also be prepared to confront unexpected events. It will be a challenging, rewarding, and unforgettable experience.



The Navy Mess in the West Wing contains a fine-dining restaurant
Obama WH Archives

HARVARD MODEL CONGRESS

Committee Structure

At HMC, the West Wing infuses the conference with an energizing sense of partisanship. The West Wing Committee is composed of two groups, the White House (which is also the Democratic National Committee under President Biden) and the Republican National Committee (RNC). The White House represents the interests of the president while the RNC directs the Republicans as the opposition party. Following the initial introduction, the two groups will meet in different rooms and function separately.

The Harvard staffers will take the role of the White House and RNC Chiefs of Staff and Deputy Chiefs of Staff. They will guide you to help ensure that the president's and RNC chair's goals are met, but keep in mind that this is the conference's most student-directed committee. You have a great deal of freedom to do your best for your party!

As the president and RNC chair are the leaders of their respective parties, the White House and RNC lead the effort to craft a coherent party agenda, message, and political strategy. However, they cannot do it alone. The input of party members should be considered when making such decisions in order to foster party unity and loyalty.

Activities at the Conference

With the continuous need to respond to new developments around the world, there is no such thing as a "typical day" or set schedule for the White House or RNC. Instead, staffers plan their schedules around achieving several of their priorities. They decide what needs to be accomplished in the four-year term, and break it down by year, month, week, and day. The drive to get the job done provides structure to the chaos.

During the HMC weekend, White House and RNC staffers should accomplish the following:

- Debate and write party platforms, which are statements of the party's beliefs and convictions.
- Present platforms to House and Senate large party caucuses
- Nominate party candidates for the upcoming Presidential Election taking into account factors of electability, party representation, and more.
- Debate and set White House and RNC agendas. The White House and RNC agendas differ from the party platforms in that they are more limited lists of the president's or RNC chair's top priorities, as opposed to a complete statement of beliefs. The agenda is developed in consultation with the president or RNC chair.
- Write and present a State of the Union Address or an opposition response before Congress.

- Lobby legislators from appropriate committees.
- Maintain presence in Congressional committees to stay up on proceedings.
- Conduct press briefings.
- Appear on HMC-Media programming.
- Interview with the HMC print media press.
- Conduct opinion polling.
- Obtain Cabinet support for agenda.
- Lobby and mobilize interest groups.
- Write strategy memos to keep legislators loyal to the party line.

That list may seem daunting, but you are not expected to do all these tasks yourself. Instead, the White House and RNC operate under the principle of collective responsibility.

WHITE HOUSE/DNC vs. RNC

With less than a year until the general election, the clock is ticking on finalizing party platforms and gaining support. Thus, the focus and main priority at HMC 2024 for both the White House and RNC will be to debate and amend their respective party's platform. The platforms are statements of the convictions and beliefs of the entire party and serve as guides for legislators, constituents, and the press throughout the conference.

In addition to the party platforms, however, there will be many opportunities for the DNC and RNC to compete for support, and ultimately, for the White House in 2024 over the course of the weekend.

Campaign Scoring

Although the goal of each campaign is to win votes and outmaneuver the opposing party, there are many small steps along the road to victory. Examples include receiving an endorsement from an interest group or a shining appearance in an HMC-TV advertisement, defeating an adversary in a heated debate or composing an impassioned plea to the voters. There is no one formula for success, but there will be plenty of opportunities to build support for a campaign.

Initiatives will be scored on a point system that represents the percentage of votes won. For example, a score of 75-25 represents 75% of votes going to Party A, and 25% of votes going to Party B. Throughout the conference, there will be ways for your teams to both gain and lose points (and in doing so, take points away or give points to the other team). It is your job to strategize effectively in order to

gain the most points possible and win the game of electoral tug of war.

Positive and Negative Press

Most people will not vote for a platform without having interacted positively with their representatives. Successful party teams have a knack for finding the cameras and reporters who will give them positive press. Your team will be responsible for orchestrating media appearances that will allow your message to reach large numbers. Positive media can propel a team to victory. It is the party staff's duty to adequately prep their press representatives so that the party's sound bites appeal to voters and garner praise from the media. Be prepared, though, as some reporters would love nothing more than to catch a campaign team member saying something damaging or to twist words or actions into a news story that could damage a campaign. Media can be both the best friend and the worst enemy of a political party.

Crisis Response and Scandal

Both teams should be prepared throughout the weekend to confront unexpected situations. Your response to these situations — or crises — can make or break your party's bid for victory. Corruption allegations, extramarital affairs, drug busts, tax evasion: nothing is out of the realm of possibility for HMC 2024 crises. In dealing with these situations, your team will have to work together to implement creative strategy that muffles the media, appeases the voters, and calms endorsers. Based on the effectiveness of your response, you could gain or lose a bloc of voters.

Fundraising and Endorsement

Finally, the last major way to gain points for your platform will be to secure fundraising and endorsements. Both campaign funds and endorsements can be secured via members of Congress and other members of government, and through the lobbyist groups. Though each campaign team will start with a designated amount of money to spend on advertisements, speaking engagements and rallies, and other campaign events, extra fundraising will be necessary to campaign on all five issues successfully. Similarly, endorsements are a huge tool for your teams to sway public opinion. Convincing politicians, public figures, and activist groups to put their name behind your party will be a huge source of votes for your team.

One of the most effective ways to reach endorsers is to meet them and speak to them in person. The teams will have the opportunity to visit congressional committees at HMC 2024 and share ideas, answer questions, and defend his or her issues. All team members will be expected to have a general understanding of the issues

discussed in the committees. It will be a challenge to appear in, and be prepared for, every committee — perhaps impossible with such a busy schedule — but the more voters you encounter and impress, the better the chance for your success. Committee meetings will be integral to securing campaign funds and endorsement.

Topic-by-Topic Points

As the teams will be competing around five separate races (one per topic), the winning team will be the one that secures election for at least three out of its five issue stances. Additionally, points will be awarded for campaigning done for a more “general” platform - these points may be distributed as West Wing delegates decide. Both teams, winning and losing, will have the opportunity to respond publicly to the results.

Presidential Nomination and Election

In selecting candidates, you will need to capture the essence of your political party in present-day America. The White House/RNC have an obligation to nominate candidates that represent the majority-aligned issues, even if the party elites disagree on issues. Throughout the conference, delegates will be scored on their ability to accurately represent their respective party’s stances on political issues — including the candidate they nominate for the election.

CONCLUSION

As a member of the White House Office or the staff of the RNC, you have already proven yourself to be one of the nation’s most capable public servants. You possess deep convictions, strong opinions, expert knowledge, and savvy political skills. You work long hours in cramped offices and cannot remember the last time you had a social life.

To top it all off, you do not even get to take credit for your successes; when you succeed, it is the president/party who receives the credit. This means that you must have a passion for anonymity—your successes are the executive’s successes. That speech you just spent two months writing? To the outside world, it was the president/chair’s speech. Yet if you make a gaffe, it was your mistake. So, what makes it worthwhile?

For some, it may be the allure of power; for others, it is the acknowledgment of competition and successes inside the Beltway. But for most, it is a compelling sense of duty. You are now part of a team that shares the same beliefs and wants to make this country a better place. Furthermore, you believe in the leader of your party. You work in the most powerful building in the world (or hope to after the next election), just steps away from the office where John F.

Kennedy prevented nuclear war, Richard Nixon spoke to a man on the moon, and George W. Bush comforted the nation after the tragedy of September 11th.

Only through creativity, dedication, and skill can a party hope to be counted amongst the successful. The work of HMC 2024 is difficult, but it is only through such burdens that the quality of a party can be determined. Members of the West Wing enter at a pivotal time, when a strong policy platform is needed to help win the 2024 election. Plotting campaign strategies, preparing policy positions, drafting speeches and quotable sound bites — these are essential preparations for every party.

In the words of former White House Chief of Staff and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, “You are a servant of the American people. Do it well.”

GUIDE TO FURTHER RESEARCH

Although much of the basic knowledge for campaigns has been provided in this guide, additional research will be necessary, in large part due to the constantly changing nature of current affairs. Anything substantive about a party’s positions could change in a matter of days or hours following the occurrence of new events domestically or around the world. It will also be useful to follow politics in general. Pay attention to a few different news sources to ensure balanced coverage.

To learn more about the five key issues you will be focusing on, read the briefings written by HMC staffers on these topics. They are all located on the website (under House and Senate tabs); there is at least one briefing per issue. The briefings do an excellent job of covering the major points of the issues to be discussed and detail the various points of debate that will be guiding the legislators. In these briefings, you should pay particular attention to the “Focus of Debate” and “Possible Solutions” sections, as they will address your questions most directly.

By the time you have read the briefings, you should have a good idea of the types of issues legislators will be addressing, as well as the concerns and goals of the executive branch regarding the issue. Members of Congress will reference information from these sections when you are lobbying them, and you should be able to respond to them quickly and accurately. That said, you are also encouraged to conduct your own research. Keep an eye out for what President Biden or Republican have to say about the issues.

Lastly, keep track of the real-life platforms of both parties, both with regards to the specific issues and to related issues which help shape the parties’ stances. Learn everything you can about your own party as well as the other party.

