

1. You are members of a small-town school board. For the past 20 years, the middle and high school social studies teachers have used a 10-minute news program from a nationally-known television network as a fun way to catch up on current events during classes on Fridays. Now, a group of parents has challenged the use of this news program, claiming that it is biased “propaganda” that favors the political party they do not support. The teachers in your district want to continue using this resource because it is relevant, engaging, and communicates important world events in an efficient running time.

In your role as school board members, you must come up with a solution that preserves teachers’ and students’ access to useful information about current events while taking the parents’ political concerns seriously. Consider ways to fairly evaluate the parents’ claims of political bias vs. the teachers’ claims that it is politically fair and balanced. Consider ways to incorporate other sources of current events information without falling victim to the same biases, or simply the biases of the “other side.” Finally, consider ways to involve students in the evaluation process and make this a teachable moment where everyone continues to learn about current events but also understands the concept of media biases from multiple political directions.

2. You are members of a small-town city council. The only person from your town to ever become even slightly famous was an astronaut who participated in the Apollo moon missions of the 1960s and 1970s. There is a monument to this astronaut in your town square that is showing its age and needs repair.

However, a group of citizens requests that the city does not spend money on repairing the Apollo Astronaut monument because they believe the moon landings are a hoax. They claim that their religious beliefs declare that the Earth is flat, and therefore celebrating the “so-called space program” violates the 1st Amendment’s separation of church and state. They have multiple professional-looking web pages and YouTube videos they can cite as evidence in favor of their position. Your local astronaut’s family, who still live in town, want the monument to be preserved and maintained.

Your task is to address both sides’ concerns in a diplomatic and respectful way while determining the fate of your local hero’s statue. Consider how to address both sides of the controversy respectfully while also attempting to verify the truth of the situation.

3. You are members of a small-town city council. As election season approaches, there have been multiple calls to the police from one of your residential neighborhoods. Most of the people in this neighborhood favor one political party, but a few residents favor a different political party. This has led to an escalation of incidents of campaign signs being stolen or defaced, bumper stickers being ripped off of cars, eggs and toilet paper being thrown at various neighbors' houses, and general neighborhood unpleasantness. Your police department is frustrated and tired of this disturbance.

Your task is to work with various community organizations and leaders, including local representatives of the various political parties, clergy, and others, to come up with a plan to restore peace to the neighborhood without violating anyone's 1st Amendment rights or relying too heavily on the police.