

SEGL / Mock Speech Assignment / Spring 2013

This exercise is called a “mock” speech assignment because some of the elements outlined in the case are hypothetical or fictitious. To begin with, imagine that you are receiving this assignment in late May 2013.

Background

Ted Cruz, a Republican from Texas, and Senator Dianne Feinstein, a California Democrat, are scheduled to speak about gun control at a CNN Town Hall Meeting in Toledo, Ohio on June 14, 2013. The audience will comprise local city officials, teachers, students, and random members of the public selected by lottery. The event will be broadcast live on CNN.

The town hall will take place exactly six months to the day after 20 children and 7 adults were killed in a gun massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. In the months since the Newtown tragedy, the nation has been roiled in debate over gun control and the right of Americans to bear arms. Both sides have spent millions of dollars trying to shape public opinion and sway politicians before an anticipated congressional vote on a federal assault weapons ban, sponsored by Senator Feinstein, over the summer.

Adding urgency -- and heightened emotion -- to the ongoing debate has been another senseless and tragic act of gun violence. In the early spring of 2013, a lone gunman armed with three handguns and an AK-47 assault rifle walked into a popular and crowded chain restaurant in suburban Ohio and killed 38 people before shooting himself. The gunman had been described as a loner and no motive was established for his attack on innocent restaurant patrons, the oldest of whom was 83 and the youngest six.

The Speakers

Cruz has been one of the nation's -- and Congress' -- most outspoken defenders of the rights of gun owners. A graduate of Harvard Law School, former law clerk for Chief Justice William Rehnquist, and former solicitor general of Texas, Cruz drafted an amicus brief in support of gun rights in the Supreme Court case known as *DC vs Heller* in 2008. Although now only a Senate freshman, he is a favorite of the conservative wing of the Republican Party in Congress and has shown a penchant for the television cameras, especially in debates about guns in the Senate Judiciary Committee, on which he sits.

Feinstein is a veteran lawmaker from San Francisco who has tirelessly fought for greater restrictions on guns. Indeed, she is motivated in part from her own personal experience. In 1978, while she was president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, an angry former supervisor entered City Hall and shot and killed Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk in their offices. Feinstein was the first to enter the offices and

see (and identify) the bodies as the gunman fled the building. She went on to become Mayor of San Francisco and then a U.S. Senator. Now in her fourth term, she is lead sponsor of *S 150, the Assault Weapons Ban of 2013*, and a long-serving member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

In March, Cruz and Feinstein sparred in committee over the constitutionality of her legislation, which would ban semi-automatic assault weapons and large capacity magazines. Their exchange drew wide attention in the press.

Speech Assignment #1:

The CNN Town Hall in Toledo is now only two weeks away. The Senate Judiciary Committee has already passed, on party lines, the assault weapons bill. Although it is unlikely to get through Congress as a whole, Senator Cruz is worried that the latest shooting in Ohio will sway public opinion in favor of the ban. Your assignment is to write a three-minute opening statement that Cruz will deliver at the beginning of the town hall event to persuade the audience that the Feinstein legislation is unnecessary and ill-advised. He will speak before Senator Feinstein.

Speech Assignment #2:

Senator Feinstein will appear at the CNN Town Hall in Toledo to bolster her case for the proposed ban on assault weapons. Having gotten her bill through the first legislative hurdle – the Judiciary Committee – she now has the bigger challenge of getting it approved by the full Senate and eventually the House. Although public opinion had been trending in favor of a ban immediately after Newtown, that support began to erode in early 2013. The latest shooting, however, has resuscitated the gun control movement and the town hall event is an opportunity for Feinstein to engage the public at an emotional and poignant moment for the country. Your assignment is to write a three-minute speech persuading listeners of the urgency and importance of the assault weapons legislation. Senator Feinstein will speak after Senator Cruz has given his remarks.