CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA
AMERICAN GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE

To Students and Parents of the American Government Experience,

Welcome!

Students, you are about to embark upon a journey which has the capacity to change your life. Our political scene in America has become a very polarized setting. Many of the debates and fundamental questions of life that you have dealt with and prepared for, as Christian high school students, take place every day in the realm of government and politics.

One of the things that we will learn in our government experience is that anyone can absolutely be crippled by low expectations. Fear not. I have very high expectations for the students in this group. The reason is simple. I have very high confidence in your abilities – probably more than you do.

You are now a student intern with Campaign For America, an actual public policy forum. Campaign For America, largely by your efforts, will be active in the political process, will publish Op Ed pieces on a regular basis on current events, will send notices to the press, and will produce work product for actual political clients. Through these activities, you will engage the political process in a way that most people never do in their lives. I will hold you accountable to your commitments in the class, and have a very high standard for your contributions.

At the end, you will know that successful completion of the American Government Experience means something. It won't simply be represented by the piece of paper that you will get at the end, or the entry on your high school transcript. Instead, it will be represented by the fact that you designed a brochure for a congressional candidate, or wrote a direct mail piece for an issue organization, or you wrote an Op Ed that gained press attention, all these not for the fact that they were accomplished by high school students, but, because of their value and worth in the real world. This experience will culminate in a trip to Washington, DC to view first hand many of the institutions that we will have been studying, and an actual visit to Congressional offices to lobby on behalf of an issue.

Through this, you will quickly learn that I am holding you to real world adult expectations. The obligation is directly on you for every requirement of the class. As a young person engaging an adult world, you have to work to establish credibility, in spite of your youth. You can do this through your professional appearance, work ethic, responsibility, and etiquette. We will review some good rules of working behavior during the first class. The basics of any working relationship are of the utmost importance. There is a point system outlined in the rules of the class. Tardiness to class or any event is severely punished in the point system. Several tardy instances will cause a point deficit almost unrecoverable for a successful completion of the class.

Let's get started. Hopefully, you've already started to pay more attention to the current election cycle, and the associated issues in this year's campaign. I would highly encourage you to build in a regular way of keeping up to date on unfolding events. On the television, political coverage during the evening network news or during cable news shows is a good way to stay informed. If your schedule prevents regular viewing, I would recommend subscribing to a podcast, CNN-Politics on iTunes. It is a daily 15-minute update by CNN on current political events. We will review more about information sources in the first class. Two websites, realclearpolitics.com and politico.com are probably the two most popular websites for political news and opinion. Begin regularly visiting these sites.

I have gotten most everyone access to the books for the first session's required reading (outlined in the syllabus). I have already ordered the rest, and will be in contact with you once they arrive.

Parents, I HIGHLY encourage you to let this class be completely the student's own. As I have made very clear, this is not a "show up for class and pass" type of experience. There is a set of expectations laid down in the rules and in a point system. As you will notice in the point system, actual political

involvement is the only way to successfully complete the American Government Experience. Do not take it as your responsibility to make sure your student has enough points to successfully complete the class. It is their responsibility. I will be communicating with them directly regarding their progress and assignments. If they are unable to make it to a class, I expect a courtesy call from the student, not from their mother or father.

Each student will need access to a computer with internet service for research, news gathering, and communication purposes. Each student will be expected to be very current and aware of ongoing issues and developments within the current election cycle. In addition, research for the Opinion Editorials will likely come from internet resources. I will be issuing each student an email address from Campaign For America. The addition of this email box should not negatively interfere with your current email. I can help you with the technical details of setting up this email. I will be communicating directly with each student through this email address very regularly. Students should be able to check the email box at least once every other day. These email addresses will be published on the Campaign For America website. Students will be expected to make contributions to the group by posting to a publicly viewable discussion board. There will be no need for Instant Messaging (IM) during the American Government Experience.

As with all internet access and internet communications that your student may have, I highly encourage you to regularly check your student's email box. In addition, I highly encourage installing an internet filter if you do not already have one. We use BSafe Online. There are other good filters available. I will communicate the technical details of the email addresses, posting to the internet site, etc. during the first class. I will also forward all access codes to their email box, etc. to the parents' email addresses. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding computer or internet access. Students will be required to post Op Eds to the website prior to each class. In addition, each student should bring 10 printed copies of their Op Ed to the class, 3-hole punched. This is the students' responsibility.

This class will be very dynamic in its content and its approach. By this, I mean that a large part of the subject matter that we will discuss in our third class has not happened yet. I will also ask your forbearance for the late notice of some events and potential invitations. For example, if a presidential candidate visits Charlotte for a public appearance, we will likely only have several days' notice, and I will likely invite the group to such an event. Inability to attend an event on such short notice will not be viewed negatively, but I want to again remind everyone of the priority of the class I have asked for, and to which you have agreed.

Many of you know about my very strong convictions about simultaneously holding youth to high standards coupled with a very high confidence in their ability to meet those standards. I am very excited to lead this experience and look forward to watching these students impress us all. Finally, this is my first time leading a group of students through this type of experience. I will probably make several mistakes, and I ask for your patience and forgiveness in advance. As always, if you have any concerns that you wish to discuss with me at any time, please feel free to call.

Sincerely,

Harry Nelson