OVERVIEW: Debating for Democracy (D4D)™ is a distinctive campus-based co-curricular program that represents the mission of Project Pericles (www.projectpericles.org) in action. On each campus, Periclean students research, develop, and advocate their opinions and positions on current public policy issues. The primary goal of D4D is to inspire and encourage all participants to become successful and resourceful advocates in their community. To encourage students to write to their elected officials, Project Pericles is requesting an original letter to an elected official from teams (two or more students) at Periclean colleges and universities. Five of these letters from five different colleges will be selected by a panel of judges as the winners of the 2016 D4D competition.

ELIGIBILITY: In order to be eligible to participate in the Letters to an Elected Official Competition, a student must a) be a full-time undergraduate at a Periclean campus; b) be a freshman, sophomore, or junior as defined by their college or university; c) write and mail a letter to an elected official, and d) provide a project proposal. Students selected to participate in the competition must be a freshman, sophomore, or junior during the Spring 2016 semester and be returning to their campus for the 2016-17 year.

SELECTION PROCESS: Students must submit their letter and project proposal to their Project Pericles Program Director by Friday, March 11, 2016. The Program Director will review each submission and select the four strongest letters and project proposals to forward to Project Pericles. Each college must email their package (in Word) of up to four letters to Jan Liss jan.liss@projectpericles.org by 5 PM EST on Friday, March 18. Please note you are welcome to set internal deadlines that are earlier if you have scheduling conflicts. The names of all of the students who worked on each letter and project proposal must be sent to Project Pericles with the students who prepared each letter clearly identified. All letters should be mailed by the students to the appropriate elected official by March 18, 2016.

A committee consisting of people with significant experience in public policy will review the submitted letters and project proposals using the criteria below. Based on this review, Project Pericles staff will select the five winning teams. We will announce the five winning teams in April 2016.

JUDGING CRITERIA: This year we are asking students to share a project proposal along with their letters. The evaluation of each letter and project proposal will rest on the students’ success at conducting high quality policy analysis and research; clarity of presentation; and adherence to the rules detailed on pages 3-4. The five packages that do the best job of meeting the following criteria will be selected as finalists and win $500 awards to move their issue forward.

1) Policy Analysis and Research: The most important aspect of the letter is the quality of the analysis and research, which determines 60% of the evaluation. The evaluation will rest on each team’s success at identifying a federal or state policy problem in their letter, proposing a solution to the problem they identified, and conducting and interpreting research to bolster their letter.

- Does the letter identify one federal or state public policy issue and explain how this issue impacts the students and their community?
• Does the letter recommend one legislative solution? Is the legislative solution feasible economically and politically?
• Does the letter contain logical judgment and analysis?
• Does the proposal demonstrate the use of primary and/or secondary resources to bolster their argument?
• Does the letter demonstrate an understanding of the historical context of the problem and solution being discussed?

2) Clarity of Presentation: Although the ability of the students to prepare a letter that meets all of the criteria discussed in the previous section is important, the ability to write a clear and compelling letter will also be considered. In addition to a logical argument, persuasive letters frequently include a compelling narrative about how the issue impacts the authors or other constituents. This section is worth 30% of the total evaluation.

• Is the letter effective in communicating the significance of the problem and the solution?
• Do the authors offer a compelling narrative? Please keep in mind that legislative staff members are reviewing hundreds of pieces of mail each day. Explaining the personal significance of an issue for the authors or other constituents and making an emotional or values based appeal can be part of writing a persuasive letter.
• Do the authors make a compelling case as constituents? Is there a tie-in to either the authors or other constituents from the congresspersons district?
• Is the written material clear and grammatically correct?

3) Quality of Related Project Proposal: The project proposal should not exceed two pages and present the authors’ strategy to have a meaningful impact on the topic they tackle in the letter. As such, the proposal should clearly outline how students can use $500 to instigate positive change. This section is worth 10% of the total evaluation.

• Does the project have a measurable impact on campus and in the community?
• Do the authors introduce a project that is feasible and original?
• Are potential challenges recognized and addressed in the project proposal?

In all cases, the goal of your project should be to advance your issue. Campus events should have a tie-in to an “ask” in which you request that your fellow students or community members take an action, such as contacting their elected officials, that will advance your issue.

The $500 award should be used for activities to move your issue forward. You are encouraged to think outside the box and come up with other ideas and suggestions. Possible uses may include, but are not limited to, advocacy and educational activities, such as advocacy trips, workshops, and other campus activities.

Typical uses of funds include, but are not limited to:
• Travel (lodging, meals, and transportation) costs to meet with your elected officials
• Costs associated with campus or community activities that educate, inform, or raise awareness about your issue
• Travel to another Periclean campus to educate their students about your issue
• Printing costs associated with developing materials that educate people about your issue
• Other (pre-approved) activities to move your issue forward
• **Awards may not be used to pay honoraria to speakers**
AWARD:
- Project Pericles will provide a $500 award to each of the top five student teams. Each college or university is eligible to receive only one award. In consultation with Project Pericles, the students can use this money to fund advocacy and education activities including lobbying trips and workshops. Teams that have won this award in the past have organized mobilizing campaigns on their campuses, led trainings, and offered informative events such as documentary screenings, election debates, panel discussions, etc. Teams have also travelled to Washington, D.C. or to their state capitol to meet with members of Congress or their legislators and their staffs to discuss the issues raised in their letters.

- Project Pericles staff will work with the winning teams to develop their advocacy and education activities. Students should be aware that they are expected to carry out significant activities to advance their issue during the academic year following the competition. Only students who are committed to carrying out significant advocacy and educational activities in the 2016-17 academic year should participate in the competition.

IMPORTANT DATES:
March 11, 2016 — All letters to an elected official are due to the Project Pericles Program Director. Program Directors may set an earlier deadline. Students should consult with their Program Director to confirm this deadline.

March 18, 2016 — Each college or university may submit up to four letters to an elected official to Project Pericles by 5:00 PM EST. A copy of the letter must also be mailed to the appropriate U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, State Senator, or State Representative.

April 2016 — A panel of experts will review the letters and Project Pericles will announce the five winning teams.

ADDITIONAL TIPS, GUIDELINES, AND RESOURCES
“Letters are an extremely effective way of communicating with your elected officials. Many legislators believe that a letter represents not only the position of the writer but also many other constituents who did not take the time to write.” American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

Many federal and state policy issues are suitable for this letter. Possible issues include: Campaign Finance* Climate Change * Federal Budget Deficit * Funding for Higher Education (Grants and Loans) * Gun Control * Immigration * K-12 Education * Pension Reform *U.S. Involvement in the Middle East

In the letter, students must identify one national or state public policy problem to be addressed and analyze how this problem impacts them personally, people in their community, people in their state, and, if a federal issue, people across the United States. In the letter, students must recommend at least one legislative solution. The students may recommend an original legislative solution (fund a NASA mission to Jupiter) or they can support or oppose a portion of a bill that is currently pending before Congress or their state legislature. In both cases, the students must support their solution with data and examples from at least two outside sources (books, journals, reliable internet sources) and discuss why their solution is better than other options. All outside research must be properly cited.
Letter and Project Proposal Writing Guidelines:

- The letter must be on a state or federal issue. Letters on local issues will not be eligible. The majority of local issues are also important federal and state issues.

- The body of the letter may not exceed 1200 words (excluding footnotes and project proposal).

- A copy of the letter must be mailed to each student’s elected official by March 18, 2016.

- Students should identify their elected official and their address. Since the authors will be urging their elected official to support or oppose a legislative solution, they will want to select the official who will be most responsive to their letter. The following website will help them identify their federal or state elected officials. http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml

- The letter must begin with the phrase "Dear Representative (last name)” or Dear Senator (last name)” and be addressed correctly.

- The letter should begin with a sentence that tells the elected official exactly what the student wants them to do. The first sentence in the letter on page 6 provides an example.

- The letter should contain the student’s mailing address so that the elected official can confirm them as a constituent and the elected official can write back.

- The students must sign and date their letter.

- All primary and secondary sources used in preparing the proposal must be cited.

- The project proposal should not exceed two pages.

Eligibility:

- Two or more students must work on the letter and project proposal.

- Students who were finalists (meaning they received an award) in a previous year are not eligible to participate.

- No student can co-author more than one submitted letter.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

The following resources will assist the student in writing their letter:

- A letter written by students at Rhodes College that was selected as the winner in 2015 appears on pages 6-7. This letter is an excellent model. The five letters that were finalists in 2015 can be viewed at http://www.projectpericles.org

- THOMAS was launched in January of 1995, at the inception of the 104th Congress. The website provides detailed federal legislative information to the public. http://thomas.loc.gov/
- C-SPAN is a private, non-profit company, created in 1979 by the cable television industry as a public service. Its mission is to provide public access to the political process. The C-SPAN website contains a wealth of information including video of Congressional hearings related to a number of federal policy issues.  http://www.c-span.org

- National Journal Group is the leading source of nonpartisan reporting on the current political environment and emerging policy trends. http://www.nationaljournal.com/njonline/

- The National Conference of State Legislatures is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories. The NCSL website provides research and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues. http://www.ncsl.org/
A Letter in Support of Net Neutrality by Reclassifying Internet Service as a Public Utility under Title II of the Communications Act of 1934

**Date:** February 2, 2015  
**From:** Alexandra Dileo and Samuel Holder

The Honorable Johnny Isakson  
United States Senate  
131 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510-1008

Dear Senator Isakson,

We write to you today to urge you to support reclassifying internet service as a public utility under Title II of the Communications Act of 1934. To that end, we ask that you vote against any proposed legislation, such as the draft legislation from Senator Thune, that falls short of this reclassification. The internet is an essential part of most Americans’ lives. Reliable and consistent internet service is integral to individuals and businesses in our community. Senator Thune’s draft legislation falls short of providing the robust protections necessary to ensure that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) cannot interfere with their customers’ legal internet activity. Reclassifying internet service as a public utility and preserving the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) flexibility to regulate ISP misconduct ensures that Americans, including college students like us, can continue to harness the power of the internet to fuel our education and innovation. Unless elected representatives like yourself support Title II reclassification, millions of Americans’ ability to access to information will remain vulnerable to the whims of a few giant companies.

Without Title II classification and the flexibility of the FCC to address discriminatory practices, ISPs can privilege their own services over their competitor’s. According to the National Broadband Plan, roughly 96% of the American population has at most two broadband providers available to them. The largest four ISPs, Comcast, AT&T, TimeWarner and Verizon, have duopolies, and in many cases, monopolies on local markets. When customers, especially those in small towns and rural communities, are dissatisfied with their internet service, they have few, if any, options to switch ISPs. This fear is not unfounded. In 2012, AT&T created a tier data system, requiring customers to pay more to use FaceTime, a competing service from Apple, on their data plans. Although AT&T backed away from its restrictions on FaceTime, under the Senator Thune’s draft legislation, ISPs would be able to get away with these same discriminatory practices under the guise of the “specialized service” loophole. Companies would be able to sell prioritized service to specific applications or content simply by calling fast lanes “specialized services.” In practice, this amounts to censorship. Internet censorship undermines democracy by inhibiting freedom of speech and denying citizens access to information. As Americans competing in a global economy, a free and open internet is essential to the success of our nation. Title II reclassification and continued oversight by the FCC will ensure that unfair prioritization does not hamper American innovation.

Title II reclassification will not stunt investment and innovation in the telecommunications sector, as some critics have claimed. Sprint CTO Stephen Bye, in a letter to FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler on January 15, 2015, undermined this assertion by stating, “Sprint does not believe that a light touch application of Title II, including appropriate forbearance, would harm the continued investment in, and deployment of, mobile broadband services.” Bye cites the explosion of growth in the wireless industry during the 1990s as evidence of the benefits of the light-touch Title II regulation we are asking you to support. Supporters of innovation agree that laws need to be flexible enough to adapt to emerging advances and challenges, especially in the field of technology. By eliminating FCC oversight of ISPs, the draft legislation strips the FCC of its power to adapt existing rules to rapidly changing technology.
Title II reclassification is the optimum way to protect consumers against discriminatory practices. While the draft legislation addresses examples of discrimination, such as blocking, fast lanes and throttling, by enumerating only a few discriminatory actions, it sets a narrow, limited standard for consumer protection. Under Title II, however, consumers would be protected from any action that could be considered “discriminatory.” In addition to reducing consumer protections, the draft legislation would make it more difficult for consumers to lodge complaints against ISPs. The draft stipulates that the FCC could only hear formal legal complaints, instead of comments submitted through FCC personnel. This cumbersome and expensive legal process would effectively deter the average American from seeking fair treatment for internet service, a service as integral to daily life as electricity.

This is a pressing issue for most Americans. From May 15 to September 15, 2014, the FCC rulemaking questionnaire “seeking public comment on how best to protect and promote an open Internet” received roughly 3.7 million comments. Americans want the FCC to ensure fair and reliable internet service. In order for America to remain at the forefront of the technology world, immediate action must be taken to ensure a vibrant and open internet. To this end, we strongly urge you to vote against any proposed legislation, like Senator Thune’s discussion draft, that falls short of reclassifying internet service as a public utility under Title II of the Communications Act of 1934.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Dileo ’16
Samuel Holder ’17

Rhodes College
2000 North Parkway
Memphis, TN 38112

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