



## DEBATING FOR DEMOCRACY (D4D)<sup>™</sup> 2020 REQUEST FOR LETTERS TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL (RFP)



**OVERVIEW:** Debating for Democracy (D4D)<sup>™</sup> inspires students to become successful advocates in their communities. To encourage engaged citizenship, Project Pericles requests original letters to elected officials from teams (two or more students) at Periclean colleges and universities.

**Five teams from five different colleges will win \$500 to work on their issue.**

**ELIGIBILITY:** A student must a) be a full-time undergraduate at a Periclean campus; b) be a first, second, or third year student as defined by their college or university during spring 2020; c) write and mail a letter to an elected official, and d) provide a project proposal. Students must be returning to campus for the 2020-2021 academic year to ensure that winning teams can work on their issues.

**SELECTION PROCESS:** Students must submit their letter and project proposal to their Project Pericles Program Director by Friday, March 13, 2020 (you are welcome to set internal deadlines that are earlier). The Program Director will review each letter and select up to four to forward to Project Pericles. The names of all of the students who worked on each letter 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 19.

A committee consisting of people with significant experience in public policy will review the submitted letters and project proposals using the criteria below and will select the winning teams for the 2020 D4D competition. We will announce the five winning teams in April 2020.

### IMPORTANT DATES:

**March 13, 2020** — All letters due to the Project Pericles Program Director. Program Directors may set an earlier deadline.

**March 19, 2020 by 5 PM EST** — All letters should be submitted (in Microsoft Word) by Program Directors to Jan Liss ([jan.liss@projectpericles.org](mailto:jan.liss@projectpericles.org)). Each college or university may submit up to four letters to an elected official. A copy of the letter must also be mailed to the appropriate U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, State Senator or State Representative.

**April 2020** — Five winning teams announced.

### AWARD:

- Project Pericles will provide a \$500 award to each of the top five teams.
- Students can use this money to fund advocacy and educational activities including advocacy trips and workshops. Project Pericles staff will work with the winning teams to develop their advocacy and education activities. 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 traveled to Washington, D.C. or to their state capital to meet with members of Congress or their legislators and their staffs to discuss the issues raised in their letters.

**JUDGING CRITERIA:** The evaluation of each submission 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. All submissions should include a project proposal that describes how the team would use an award to advance their issue.

**1) Policy Analysis and Research:** The most important aspect of the letter is the quality of the analysis and research (55% 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 present one public policy issue in a convincing manner?
- Does the letter focus on a federal or state public policy issue that impacts the student and their community and explain how this issue impacts them?
- Does the letter contain logical judgment and analysis?
- Does the letter demonstrate the use of primary (personal experience, community experts) and secondary resources (journal articles, books) 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:** The ability to write a clear and compelling letter will be considered. In addition to a logical argument, persuasive letters include a narrative about how the issue impacts the authors or other constituents (30% of the evaluation).

- Is the letter effective in communicating the significance of the problem and the solution?
- Do the authors offer a compelling narrative? Do the authors make a compelling case as constituents? Is there a tie-in to either the authors or other constituents from the elected official district?
- Are the letter and proposal clear and grammatically correct?

**3) Quality of Related Project Proposal:** The project proposal should 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 would use the \$500 award to instigate positive change. This section is worth 15% of the total evaluation. **It should not exceed two pages.**

- Is the project proposal creative and effective in addressing the problem presented in the letter?
- Is it feasible given time and financial constraints?

**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 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.**

#### **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).
- Students must 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 websites will help identify federal or state elected officials.

[http://act.commoncause.org/site/PageServer?pagename=sunlight\\_advocacy\\_list\\_page](http://act.commoncause.org/site/PageServer?pagename=sunlight_advocacy_list_page)

or

<http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml>

- A copy of the letter must be mailed to each student's elected official by March 19, 2020.
- 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 5 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 (additional guidelines):**

- 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.

## **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 \* Education Access \* Federal Budget Deficit  
Gun Control \* Health Care \* Immigration \* LGBTQ+ Advocacy \* Mass Incarceration  
Race and Inequality \* U.S. Involvement in the Middle East \* Voter Engagement*

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.*

### **SUGGESTED RESOURCES:**

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

- A letter written by students at Skidmore College that was selected as a winner in 2018 appears on pages 5-10. **This letter is an excellent model.** The five letters that were finalists in 2019 can be viewed at [https://www.projectpericles.org/uploads/1/2/2/7/122788165/2019\\_legislative\\_hearing\\_program- final.pdf](https://www.projectpericles.org/uploads/1/2/2/7/122788165/2019_legislative_hearing_program-_final.pdf)
- Congress.gov provides detailed federal legislative information to the Members of Congress, legislative. <https://www.congress.gov>
- C-SPAN is a private, non-profit company, created 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>
- The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) 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/>

## **Example of a Winning Letter and Project Proposal:**

### **Skidmore College**

#### **A Letter Proposing a Mid-Atlantic Coastal Protection Act to Protect Mid-Atlantic Coastal Waters and the Outer Continental Shelf from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) Offshore Drilling Proposals**

Date: March 5th, 2018

From: Isaac Bardin, New York, NY & Ted Randell, Buffalo, NY

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand  
New York City Office  
780 Third Avenue  
Suite 2601  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Senator Gillibrand,

We write to urge you, as a member of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife, to introduce legislation similar to the New England Coastal Protection Act (H.R. 4774). This recently proposed bill by Senator Whitehouse (D-RI) would prohibit oil and gas leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf of New England. We believe that mid-Atlantic states need similar legislation to protect our coastlines, wildlife, and communities from the Trump administration's ill-advised attempt to drill for fossil fuels off multiple coasts of the US.

We believe that you should introduce and co-sponsor a "Mid-Atlantic Coastal Protection Act", to prevent the BOEM Draft Offshore Oil & Gas Leasing Program for 2019-2024. This Act would protect the coastlines of New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. As both Democrat and Republican governors have expressed their desire to prevent East Coast offshore drilling, this act would have a ripple effect, possibly leading to new protections for critical Southern, Western, and Alaskan coastline. If we don't take action, newly developed oil and gas extraction will present irreversible threats to our nation's coastlines, endangered species and the ecosystems they rely on, coastal tourism jobs, and the progress that many mid-Atlantic states have made in developing renewable energy policy. The multiple offshore leases are part of a dated paradigm, and are a digression from New York State's trajectory of supporting clean energy through policies such as the New York State Offshore Wind Master Plan and the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). Energy independence through the adoption of renewables is a safer and more responsible use of the Outer Continental Shelf than drilling for oil.

From its birth, the Trump administration's drilling proposal was cloaked in secrecy. This policy to amend the Obama administration's five-year drilling plan wasn't announced in a public setting

(such as a press conference, as is typical), but rather, U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke presented the proposal at a closed-door meeting of the National Ocean Industries Association (NOIA) [1]. Originally launched by Exxon, NOIA was built to lobby for the expansion of oil and gas offshore drilling permits. NOIA's president, Randall Luthi, is a former Minerals Management Service official who now lobbies for industry interests, which, according to the watchdog Project on Government Oversight, should make us "question whose interests were actually being served when he was at [the] MMS".

The BOEM drilling proposal ignores the opposition of millions of Americans in the mid-Atlantic region. During BOEM's public comment period, more than 1.35 million comments from concerned citizens were submitted in opposition to Secretary Zinke's offshore drilling proposal [2]. Although Zinke said he would consider objections from state leaders and the public before finalizing the proposal, he has ignored the avalanche of public comments and requests for meetings in coastal communities, preferring instead to hobnob with oil and gas executives and industry representatives, taking over 180 direct meetings with them in the past four months [3].

It's not just the public who are enraged—politicians are too. Nearly every Eastern governor with ocean coastline opposes offshore drilling—in fact, the lone supporter of Trump's plan, out of all 20 states with proposed drilling, is Maine Governor Paul LePage [4]. Republicans and Democrats alike agree that offshore drilling would be an egregious mistake, and more than 150 House members and nearly 40 Senators have spoken out against the plan. You've experienced this outrage firsthand in the U.S. Senate—your colleagues' concerns are completely justified, as this drilling proposal would be detrimental to coastal tourism and ecosystems.

Even with far less offshore area being drilled in 2010, we saw the disastrous BP oil spill occur in the Gulf Coast, devastating coastal communities, tourism, and the marine environment for years to come, the effects of which are still felt today. With more proposed offshore drilling sites, disasters like these would inevitably begin to occur on the East coast. Even without taking spills themselves into account, the actual oil exploration process causes abandonment of habitat, disruption of mating and feeding, and beach strandings and death for marine species such as endangered cetaceans [5]. The Maryland Waterman's Association, the Lobstermen Association, and countless others have all stated that drilling would jeopardize fishing up and down the coast, an industry valued at \$214 billion [6]. If an oil spill occurs, we would see a situation similar to what happened after the BP spill, where seafood and fishing sales dropped by nearly 50% and jobs fell by a third, as consumers were concerned about consuming fish from the contaminated waters of the Gulf [5].

Additionally, tourism is an important driver of local economies—in six mid-Atlantic coastal states, there were 560,000 ocean-dependent tourism and recreation jobs that could be threatened

by drilling [5]. The nonprofit Oceana estimates that Trump’s proposal threatens more than 2.5 million jobs in total and roughly \$180 billion in GDP in coastal states overall [7].

New York specifically would be hit hard by Trump’s offshore drilling proposal— our coastal tourism industry, our waterways, and our beautiful natural ecosystems would all be irreparably damaged if no action is taken. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has requested exemption from the Trump administration’s plan, writing that “The long-term health of New York’s economy is inextricably linked to protecting our ocean resources...New York’s ocean coast is unique and plays a vital role in our economy” [8]. Cuomo also wants to develop \$6 billion of offshore wind projects on the coast of Long Island by 2028, a proposal that would power 1.2 million homes yearly with renewable energy, and would bring 5,000 jobs to the state [9]. Cuomo’s plan was developed as a direct answer and rebuke to the BOEM proposal, and the winner of the two is clear— the wind energy plan would power over one million New York State homes for the foreseeable future, while Trump’s plan (even if all the accessible areas in the Atlantic, Pacific, and the Gulf Coast were drilled) would meet America’s oil demands for only *two years* [7].

As your constituents and as ocean and clean energy advocates, we believe you have the unique position as a sitting member of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife, to propose and co-sponsor a bill identical to H.R. 4774 “The New England Coastal Protection Act,” except that this bill would aid the *mid-Atlantic* states’ critical coastlines. Introducing this act would demonstrate your commitment to New York’s clean and progressive energy policy, and would fight for the future of New York State in Washington D.C., just as Gov. Cuomo is similarly fighting for us in Albany. If we don’t act now, coastlines will be at risk, New York’s economy could worsen, tourism and fishing jobs would be lost, and marine life could be further threatened. But by leading the way on this issue for the mid-Atlantic, you will cause a ripple that grows into a wave, paving the way for even ambivalent Republicans to reach across the aisle and join with Democrats to stop the BOEM drilling plan. We hope you will stand alongside New York residents and fight to defeat this unprecedented, undemocratic, and ill-advised plan.

Sincerely,

Ted Randell & Isaac Bardin, Skidmore College  
815 N Broadway  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

## Footnotes

- [1]. Sturgis, S. (2017, April 14). The energy lobbyists linked to Trump's offshore drilling plans. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <https://www.facingsouth.org/2017/04/energy-lobbyists-linked-trumps-offshore-drilling-plans>
- [2]. More Than A Million Comments Submitted In Opposition To Trump Administration's Offshore Drilling Proposal. (2018, March 06). Retrieved March 06, 2018, from <https://www.pnewswire.com/news-releases/more-than-a-million-comments-submitted-in-opposition-to-trump-administrations-offshore-drilling-proposal-300609381.html>
- [3]. Fears, D. (2018, February 28). For many Republicans, Trump's offshore drilling plan and beaches don't mix. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/for-some-south-carolina-republicans-trumps-offshore-drilling-plan-and-beaches-dont-mix/2018/02/27/a953dc98-1359-11e8-9065-e55346f6de81\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.74d2dfdce88a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/for-some-south-carolina-republicans-trumps-offshore-drilling-plan-and-beaches-dont-mix/2018/02/27/a953dc98-1359-11e8-9065-e55346f6de81_story.html?utm_term=.74d2dfdce88a)
- [4]. Merica, D. (2018, January 12). Nearly every governor with ocean coastline opposes Trump's drilling proposal. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/11/politics/governors-ocean-coastline-offshore-drilling-trump/index.html>
- [5]. Meyersohn, N. (2018, January 31). Trump's offshore drilling plan could hurt Maine lobsters and Maryland crabs. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <http://money.cnn.com/2018/01/31/news/trump-offshore-drilling/index.html>
- [6]. Fishing and Seafood Industries a Strong Part of the U.S. Coastal Economy. (2017, September 20). Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <https://www.commerce.gov/news/blog/2016/06/fishing-and-seafood-industries-strong-part-us-coastal-economy>
- [7]. D'Angelo, C. (2018, March 07). New Offshore Drilling Analysis Shows What Trump's Plan Puts At Stake. Retrieved March 07, 2018, from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/oceana-analysis-offshore-drilling-trump\\_us\\_5a9f328ae4b002df2c5ea246](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/oceana-analysis-offshore-drilling-trump_us_5a9f328ae4b002df2c5ea246)
- [8]. Donnelly, G. (2018, January 16). Gov. Cuomo Asks That New York Be Exempt From Trump's Offshore Drilling Plans. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <http://fortune.com/2018/01/16/offshore-drilling-ny/>
- [9]. Berke, J. (2018, February 05). New York's \$6 billion plan for offshore wind shows that oil drilling really is on the way out. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <http://www.businessinsider.com/new-york-state-6-billion-offshore-wind-industry-plan-2018-2>

For more information, refer to the text of H.R. 4774 “The New England Coastal Protection Act” at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-115hr4774ih/pdf/BILLS-115hr4774ih.pdf>

## **Project Proposal**

### Overview:

The BOEM's proposed sale of oil and gas drilling leases throughout the mid-Atlantic presents a threat to coastal communities and ecosystems. This offshore drilling plan has concerned scientists, the environmental community, coastal tourism and fisheries industries, state and federal officials, and many members of the public. Using grassroots activism, advocacy, and informed discussion, our project will harness those concerns and turn them into action by leading a trip to Albany to create real change through legislation, as well as by holding an event that educates the public more about this pressing issue in order to change minds and spark critical discussions about US energy policy. Through new policies in Congress, citizen protests and activism movements, and by harnessing the passion and knowledge found right here on Skidmore's campus (as well as others), we can prevent catastrophic future oil spills and help save coastal communities and ecosystems, as well as providing a push towards the types of renewable energies Governor Cuomo outlines in his wind energy plan. Our proposed Mid-Atlantic Coastal Protection Act is a pertinent and critical issue for Senator Gillibrand, who sits on the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife. Through a trip to Albany using our grant money, we hope to convince a U.S. Congressman to introduce our bill in Congress, as well as whip up support for the bill in the U.S. Senate.

### Goal:

The goal of our project is not only to urge policy action by our elected officials, but also to increase awareness and support for our issue through public discussion and education. Both as New York college students and as New York voters, we feel we have valuable avenues of action open to us to create change. Our goal is broader than just mid-Atlantic offshore drilling—we believe that one ripple will grow into a wave, with politicians, community stakeholders, and leaders around the nation fighting to end the BOEM's offshore drilling plan. By setting an example in the mid-Atlantic, we can also show that policies of green, renewable energy can be better for economic growth and jobs in the long term than oil and gas would, and that these forward-looking energy policies are the key to a sustainable future, both in terms of the environment and the economy. Finally, by using the passion for activism found on many modern-day college campuses, we want to help lead a movement to make people care about energy policy and the impacts it has on local communities and economies—through this movement, we can create a more energized, responsible, sustainable, and mindful populace.

### Target Audience:

Our target audience is members of the Senate—specifically, other sitting members of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife, whose purview this issue falls under. The original New England Coastal Protection Act started in the Senate, serving as a template for our similar bill. Our second target audience is the politically motivated and active student body at Skidmore College and other colleges that participate in Project Pericles. Groups of students will be paired up with knowledgeable volunteer community members, professors, and members of environmental non-profit organizations to go to Albany on a trip to create change.

Activities:

Our three activities are built to create legislative change, raise awareness of public concern, and create public discussion and debate of our issue, respectively. Our first activity is built to create legislative change— students and volunteers will take a trip to Albany, holding discussions with public officials to try and gain support for our Act. We’ll also meet with our local U.S. Congressman, Paul Tonko, to get him to sponsor our Mid-Atlantic Coastal Protection Act in the U.S. House of Representatives— although Tonko’s district doesn’t border the coast, many inland Congressmen from land-locked districts supported the similar New England bill. By trying to get both senators from NY to sign on, by introducing the Act in the House, and by trying to change the minds of unreceptive Congressmen from districts in upstate NY, we will start the legislative process as a local grassroots effort that will turn into a wave of support in the entire mid-Atlantic region. Our second activity is a letter-writing event where Skidmore students will tell the BOEM their opinion on the offshore drilling plan under the period of public comment that is currently open. This event will teach passionate students that they have a voice, and that they can affect the outcomes of issues commonly thought too big for one person to make a difference. Our third event will be a screening of the PBS documentary *The Great Invisible*, a tale about the dangers of offshore drilling to coastal communities and ecosystems, told through the eyes of survivors of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion. Following the movie, a panel of volunteer fisherman/ coastal residents (for instance, Moby Rick, Long Island and Saratoga Springs resident) and members of advocacy organizations (for instance, Surfrider New York volunteers) would lead a discussion on the BOEM drilling plan, spurring lively debate and public interest in our critical issue. Besides these three individual events, our activism on our issue and bill would continue in the 2018-19 academic year.

Budget:

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Supplies</u>	<u>Cost</u>
1. Trip to Albany	Yellow schoolbus rental for one day, seats 45 people	\$300.00
2. Letter-writing and public comment event	Posters advertising event, paper and postage for letters to the BOEM	\$100.00
3. <i>The Great Invisible</i> screening, panel discussion, and reception at Skidmore College	Light refreshments for reception, provided through Skidmore Dining Services catering	\$100.00
		<b>Total: \$500</b>