

Great Decisions is America's Longest-Standing Global Affairs Education Program

Choose from two Great Decisions Discussion Groups (GD) being formed in January to join with others who are also interested in discussing international issues. Or join both! One will meet at the Dolores Library on the last monthly Saturday morning and study 2010 topics, the other monthly meeting at the Mancos Library at 10:30am will study 2009 topics with no overlap of the topics.

The *Great Decisions* Program is used by community-based discussion groups, schools and universities, civic and religious institutions, and retirement communities - all of which share a common belief in the need for popular education in international affairs.

The goal of a discussion group is not to master the eight topics of the *Great Decisions* briefing book, but rather to deepen one's awareness and understanding of these important issues as they relate to and shape U.S. foreign policy objectives. A good discussion is characterized by the informed and thought-provoking dialog between individuals!

A participant in *Great Decisions* discussion groups is any individual with an interest in expanding his/her knowledge of international relations as well as engaging in active discussion of crucial global issues. *Great Decisions* is used by a wide range of people, from high school students to retirees, and participation is not limited to those with an expert knowledge of foreign affairs.

Great Decisions discussion groups focus on the *Great Decisions* briefing book. This well researched annual publication provides eight timely global topics read by group participants prior to meetings, in order to guarantee that all discussion group members come together from the same point of reference, with the same facts and basic understanding of the issues to be discussed. Everyone is encouraged to share his or her thoughts and each participant's point of view carries equal weight.

Participants consider discussion groups a "safe" environment because they provide everyone with the opportunity to speak. Each participant's point of view carries equal weight and everyone is encouraged to share opinions and ideas. Consensus is not a goal. Discussion Group participants do not attempt to "convert" participants, because there is a mutual respect for each member's experiences, value systems and beliefs. The true focus of the Discussion Group is the critical examination of all issues and opinions, each recognized as equally valid.

Each group has a group leader, who organizes meeting times and dates. The group leader leads a balanced discussion of *Great Decisions* topics. At the conclusion of each discussion, participants fill out opinion ballots, which are then collected by the group Leader, so they may be tabulated for the *National Opinion Ballot Report*. The discussion leader is not expected to be a 'font of wisdom' and no specific knowledge of foreign policy or international affairs is required. His or her primary role will be to mediate the discussion and enable a fair exchange of ideas on each of the eight issues in the briefing book. The measure of a good discussion leader is the ability to draw the most from each group participant.

In addition to the briefing book and opinion ballots, *Great Decisions* discussion groups will utilize the *Teacher's Guide*, *Great Decisions Television Series* and the *Great Decisions Online* e-newsletter in order to study a topic more closely.

The Foreign Policy Association strives to help Americans gain a better understanding and interest in significant world issues in the belief that in a democracy, a concerned and informed public is the foundation for an effective foreign policy. Through the Opinion Balloting process, the Great Decisions program not only facilitates greater citizen understanding of important global issues, but offers Americans an opportunity to make their views known to policymakers.

There are at least 13 Great Decision discussion groups in Colorado, 3 organized by a local League of Women Voters.

Specific information regarding the two discussion groups in Montezuma County is found on League of Montezuma County's website, www.lwvmontezuma.org

The Great Decisions in Foreign Policy television series, produced by the independent Foreign Policy Association, returns for its 26th season on PBS. The series give armchair diplomats in-depth analysis and expert opinion on the ten most critical global issues facing America in the year ahead. With host Ralph Begleiter, former world affairs correspondent for CNN.

Information for this article came primarily from Foreign Policy Association's website referring to its Great Decision program. www.fpa.org. If you have any further questions or would like to request these complimentary promotional materials, please contact FPA at programs@fpa.org or 800-628-5754 ext. 250. For information on the two local Great Decision discussion groups being formed call 882-2401, 533-7600 or 882 -4666.