

How important is congressional oversight in times of crisis?

The Truman Committee



Supporting Questions

1. How did the Truman Committee assist with the mobilization of economic, military, and social resources?
2. How did the war effort on the home front affect the roles of women and other marginalized groups?

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How important is congressional oversight in times of crisis?

Content Standards

MI USHG - 7.2.3 Impact of World War II on American Life – analyze the changes in American life brought about by U.S. participation in World War II, including:

- the mobilization of economic, military, and social resources.
- the role of women, African Americans, and ethnic minority groups in the war effort, including the work of A. Philip Randolph and the integration of U.S. military forces.
- the role of the home front in supporting the war effort.

Staging the Question

Students read Harry Truman 03/24/41 (adapted excerpt) national radio broadcast introducing the committee to the nation. Students answer the comprehension questions for themselves.

Supporting Question 1

How did the Truman Committee assist with the mobilization of economic, military, and social resources?

Supporting Question 2

How did the war effort on the home front affect the roles of women and other marginalized groups?

Formative Performance Task

Students complete a graphic organizer about different aspects of the Truman Committee investigation.

Formative Performance Task

Students use a T-chart to categorize evidence from the Willow Run investigation.

Featured Sources

Curated [WebQuest](#) site with the following:

1. “Happy” Chandler’s Pool

- Source 1A: Image of Albert Chandler and his family beside his pool (c. 1940s)
- Source 1B: New York Times Article Excerpt (1942)
- Source 1C: Poster for Philadelphia Salvage Committee (c. 1941-43)
- Source 1D: Oral history transcript excerpt from Matthew J. Connelly (1967)
- Source 1E: Truman Committee excerpt about Senator Chandler’s pool (1942)

2. Carnegie-Illinois Steel

- Source 2A: Image of S. S. Schenectady split in two, sitting in the harbor (1943)
- Source 2B: Adapted excerpt of Robert Irvin’s oral history interview (1970)
- Source 2C: Photo of the Irvin Works logbook with falsified steel reports (c. 2020)
- Source 2D: Transcript of Irene Pasternak’s Statement to the committee (2025)

3. Willow Run

- Source 3A: Wall Street Journal Newspaper headline (1943)
- Source 3B: Image, Mrs. Martha Rohdes in The Empennage (1943)
- Source 3C: Image, Working on the Assembly Line (1943)
- Source 3D: Excerpt from Truman Committee Report (1942)
- Source 3E: Image, Couple at home at Willow Run (1943)
- Source 3F: Newspaper headline, Wall Street Journal (1943)
- Source 3G: New York Times article headline (1943)
- Source 3H: Image, Willow Run Village (circa 1943)
- Source 3I: Chicago Defender newspaper article excerpt (1943)
- Source 3J: Michigan Chronicle excerpt (1942)
- Source 3K-2M: Excerpts of letters from NAACP found in the Truman Committee Willow Run Report Appendix (c. 1943)

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- Source 3N: Image of rioting at Sojourner Truth housing project (c. 1943)
- Source 3O: Levin Center Willow Run video from PBS

4. CANOL

- Source 4A: Map of the CANOL pipeline (c. 1943)
- Source 4B: New York Times article reporting on committee's report (1944)
- Source 4C: Newspaper headline announcing opening of oil refinery (1944)
- Source 4D: Inflation calculator
- Source 4E: Newspaper headline announcing closing of pipeline (1945)
- Source 4F: Modern article about the environmental cleanup of the pipeline site which has since been completed.

Assessment

Students write a persuasive letter to their members of Congress, citing examples from the Truman Committee to either urge them to engage in more investigations or praise them for not wasting their time needlessly investigating.

Extension/Taking Informed Action

What could bring about the same levels of social change today that were seen in WWII, and what role could Congress play in getting us there? Have students discuss and come up with options that they could send to their member of Congress as suggestions. (These suggestion emails or letters could also include the historical context of the Truman Committee as background, to help the elected official understand.)

Required Supplies/Materials:

Day 1

- Staging the question: Truman Radio Address handout
- Chromebook/computer
- WebQuest QR Code strips
- Supporting question 1 worksheet

Day 2

- Chromebook/computer
- Supporting question 1 worksheet
- Supporting question 2 worksheet
- Essay rubric and instructions

Suggested Pacing: Two 60-minute periods with an optional third period for an in-class assessment

Lesson Sequence

Period 1

1. Distribute the "Staging the Question: Truman Radio Address" transcript handout. Have students read the adapted excerpt of the radio address from then-Senator Harry Truman announcing the creation of the Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program. As they read, they should highlight or underline anything which helps them answer the following three questions:
 - As the United States increased its defense spending, what was Truman most worried about?
 - What was he asking regular citizens to do about it?
 - If you heard this address on the radio, and had "information of irregularities based on facts," what would you do? **(10 min)**

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2. Pass out the supporting question 1 worksheet. Explain that true to Truman's word, the committee established by the Senate investigated issues large and small connected to the war effort. Today, they are going to have an opportunity to look at one of several of those issues for themselves. To help get them started, use the investigation into Senator Albert "Happy" Chandler's swimming pool (investigation 1) as an example. Review the documents as a class and complete that row of the chart. **(15 min)**
3. Following the example, distribute access to the WebQuest and assign students to one of the three remaining investigations. The investigations are:
 - Carnegie-Illinois Steel (investigation 2)
 - Willow Run (investigation 3)
 - CANOL Project (investigation 4)
4. Give students the remainder of the class period to complete the graphic organizer using the information on their assigned portion of the website. **(30 min)**

Period 2

1. Begin by placing students into groups where all three students completed different investigations. Have students swap answers with each other. Once they have completed their worksheet, they should individually answer supporting question 1 in the space provided. Do not collect completed worksheets yet, as students will need them for the assessment activity. **(20 min)**
2. Bring the class back together and tell them that they are all now going focus on one specific investigation: the Willow Run Bomber Plant in Ypsilanti. This investigation offers an opportunity to explore some of the social implications of the war for women and people of color here on the home front. Tell students that even if they looked at this investigation before, they are going to be looking at it again with new eyes, and a new focus.
3. Have students click on the "Willow Run Faces Inquiry by Senate" headline on the WebQuest and distribute the supporting question 2 worksheet.
4. Get students back into their groups of three from the end of the WebQuest and using the sources provided, have students fill out their worksheet. **(20 min)**
5. After finishing the T-Chart students should individually answer supporting question 2 at the bottom of their handout. Have two or three students share to answer:
 - What was the biggest new opportunity you saw?
 - What was the most significant barrier that remained?
 - What do you wish there had been more information about? **(10 min)**
6. When students have finished, introduce the rubric for their final assessment and answer any student questions. Give students the remainder of the time to begin formulating their responses. This assessment is done individually. **(10 min)** *Note: the assessment can be assigned for homework or completed in a subsequent class period.*

Staging the question

Adapted excerpts of Senator Harry Truman's nationwide broadcast announcing the creation of the Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program.

Truman, H. (1941, March 24). *March 24, 1941 – Radio Forum (broadcast), Washington D.C. | Harry S. Truman.*
<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/truman-papers/draft-file-1935-1945/march-24-1941-radio-forum-broadcast-washington-dc?documentid=NA&pagenumber=1>

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE RADIO AUDIENCE: -

This great country of ours is facing a great emergency, perhaps the most serious in its history. It [has become] necessary to declare ourselves the Arsenal of Democracy.

It has become necessary to let enormous contracts [...] of [...] everything necessary for the defense program [...]. Some sixteen and one-half billions of dollars in appropriations have been authorized and appropriated for defense.

[...]It has been charged that in the name of speed many of the safeguards usually observed in government transactions have been thrown aside and overlooked.

The Senate has decided to go to the bottom of all these charges. It has created a special [bipartisan] committee [to do so.]

[...]

We want to know if we have really made speed by all this haste. We want to know if the job is being done with minimum [disruption to the day-to-day business] of the country. We recognize the importance of conducting this investigation so as not to add delay and confusion to an accelerated defense program.

When people create delays for profit, when they sell poor products for defense use, when they cheat on price and quality, they aren't any different from a draft dodger and the public-at-large feels just that way about it.

Any citizen who has information of irregularities based on facts, [related to this topic], should inform the Senate Special Committee on National Defense. The Committee's address is the Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C.

Name: _____

Guiding questions

1. As the United States increased its defense spending, what was Truman most worried about?
2. What was Truman asking regular citizens to do about it?
3. If you heard this address on the radio, and “ha[d] information of irregularities based on facts,” what would you do?



Staging the Question	Adapted excerpts of Senator Harry Truman’s nationwide broadcast announcing the creation of the Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program.
Truman, H. (1941, March 24). <i>March 24, 1941 – Radio Forum (broadcast), Washington D.C. Harry S. Truman.</i> https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/truman-papers/draft-file-1935-1945/march-24-1941-radio-forum-broadcast-washington-dc?documentid=NA&pagenumber=1	

Guiding questions **ANSWER KEY**

1. As the United States increased its defense spending, what was Truman most worried about?

Truman was most worried about the emphasis on speed and whether the government is wasting money.

2. What was Truman asking regular citizens to do about it?

He wanted people to write into the committee. “See something, say something.”

3. If you heard this address on the radio, and “ha[d] information of irregularities based on facts,” what would you do?

Answers will vary

 <p>Truman Committee WebQuest bit.ly/trumanwebquest</p>	 <p>Truman Committee WebQuest bit.ly/trumanwebquest</p>
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Name: _____

Supporting question 1: How did the Truman Committee assist with the mobilization of economic, social, and military resources?

Directions: Use the WebQuest sources to fill out the graphic organizer for the investigation you've been assigned. Then, with partners, fill out the graphic organizer for the other investigations.

1. Senator Albert "Happy" Chandler's Swimming Pool			
Write a one-sentence summary of the issue.			
Primary category	Military	Economic	Social
What are two quotes that convinced you that the primary category is appropriate?			
Secondary category	Military	Economic	Social
Why is this the secondary category? Cite one piece of evidence to explain.			
2. Carnegie-Illinois Steel			
Write a one-sentence summary of the issue.			
Primary category	Military	Economic	Social
What are two quotes that convinced you that the primary category is appropriate?			
Secondary category	Military	Economic	Social
Why is this the secondary category? Cite one piece of evidence to explain.			

3. Willow Run			
Write a one-sentence summary of the issue.			
Primary category	Military	Economic	Social
What are two quotes that convinced you that the primary category is appropriate?			
Secondary category	Military	Economic	Social
Why is this the secondary category? Cite one piece of evidence to explain.			
4. CANOL Project			
Write a one-sentence summary of the issue.			
Primary category	Military	Economic	Social
What are two quotes that convinced you that the primary category is appropriate?			
Secondary category	Military	Economic	Social
Why is this the secondary category? Cite one piece of evidence to explain.			

How did the Truman Committee assist with the mobilization of economic, military and social resources?

Name: _____

Supporting question 1: How did the Truman Committee assist with the mobilization of economic, social, and military resources? **ANSWER KEY**

Directions: Use the WebQuest sources to fill out the graphic organizer for the investigation you've been assigned. Then, with partners, fill out the graphic organizer for the other investigations.

1. Senator Albert "Happy" Chandler's Swimming Pool			
Write a one-sentence summary of the issue.	<i>A Senator might have built a pool using steel that he wasn't allowed to use.</i>		
Primary category	Military	Economic	Social
What are two quotes that convinced you that the primary category is appropriate?	<i>Answers will vary</i>		
Secondary category	Military	Economic	Social
Why is this the secondary category? Cite one piece of evidence to explain.	<i>You need steel for the war, I guess (the poster says so) but it seems more of a resources issue.</i>		
2. Carnegie-Illinois Steel			
Write a one-sentence summary of the issue.	<i>Irving Works is faking steel inspection numbers, leading to bad steel.</i>		
Primary category	Military	Economic	Social
What are two quotes that convinced you that the primary category is appropriate?	<i>Answers will vary</i>		
Secondary category	Military	Economic	Social
Why is this the secondary category? Cite one piece of evidence to explain.	<i>We probably wasted money, but that isn't really talked about here.</i>		

3. Willow Run	
Write a one-sentence summary of the issue.	<i>Production is too slow and there is not enough housing.</i>
Primary category	Military Economic Social
What are two quotes that convinced you that the primary category is appropriate?	<i>Answers will vary</i>
Secondary category	Military Economic Social
Why is this the secondary category? Cite one piece of evidence to explain.	<i>Most of the sources talk about how housing is the big problem. Obviously, bombers helped us win the war militarily, but the sources don't focus on that.</i>
4. CANOL Project	
Write a one-sentence summary of the issue.	<i>U.S. Government paid millions to build an oil pipeline through Canada to Alaska that got shut down after less than a year.</i>
Primary category	Military Economic Social
What are two quotes that convinced you that the primary category is appropriate?	<i>Answers will vary</i>
Secondary category	Military Economic Social
Why is this the secondary category? Cite one piece of evidence to explain.	<i>Wasting money hurts the military too- and the Army was heavily involved in the project- but this one is really all about the dollars and cents.</i>

How did the Truman Committee assist with the mobilization of economic, military and social resources?

The Truman Committee investigated a wide range of industries and made sure that all the money was being well-spent, and no one was breaking the laws.

Name: _____

Supporting question 2: How did the war effort on the home front affect the roles of women and other marginalized groups?

Directions: Use the Willow Run page on the WebQuest to fill out the table below.

	Evidence of New Opportunities (Cite a minimum of two sources)	Evidence of Lasting Barriers (Cite a minimum of two sources)
Women		
African Americans		

What do you wish there had been more information about?

How did the war effort on the home front affect the roles of women and other marginalized groups?

Name: _____

Supporting question 2: How did the war effort on the home front affect the roles of women and other marginalized groups? ANSWER KEY

Directions: Use the Willow Run page on the WebQuest to fill out the table below.

	Evidence of New Opportunities (Cite a minimum of two sources)	Evidence of Lasting Barriers (Cite a minimum of two sources)
Women	Answers will vary-may include Source 2A and Source 2C	Answers will vary-may include Source 2J and Source 2E
African Americans	Answers will vary-may include Source 2J and Source 2K	Answers will vary-may include Source 2I and 2J

What do you wish there had been more information about?

Answers will vary, but may include more information about women, or about how the housing situation was ultimately settled at Willow Run regarding race, all areas where the Truman Committee did not focus.

How did the war effort on the home front affect the roles of women and other marginalized groups?

Answers will vary

Compelling question: How important is congressional oversight in times of crisis?

You are an engaged citizen during WWII, writing to your members of Congress to comment on the Truman Committee either urging your representative to tell Truman to engage in more investigations or criticizing him for wasting time needlessly investigating. Use three pieces of evidence you encountered in the inquiry to support your claim and persuade your Congressperson to act.

In your letter, you must include:

1. A topic sentence that states your claim
2. Three pieces of evidence (cited) which support your claim.
3. An explanation (in your own words) of HOW that evidence supports your claim.
4. One piece of evidence which could be used against your claim, with an explanation as to why that evidence and argument wasn't persuasive enough for you to change your claim.

Because this is a letter intended to be read by your congressional representative, your writing must be free of grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.

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Criteria	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Needs Improvement
Claim	Clearly takes a position on the issue; provides detailed background and relevant context.	Clearly takes a position on the issue; some background provided.	Takes a position on the issue but lacks clarity or detail.	Position on the issue is vague, missing, or not connected to the question.
Rationale for Support (Evidence 1)	Provides a thoughtful, persuasive, and well-supported explanation for your claim.	Explains why you are making your claim, with some supporting reasons.	Gives a basic reason for your claim, explanation lacks depth.	Offers little or no explanation for your claim. Has no cited sources.
Rationale for Support (Evidence 2)	Provides a thoughtful, persuasive, and well-supported explanation for your claim.	Explains why you are making your claim, with some supporting reasons.	Gives a basic reason for your claim, explanation lacks depth.	Offers little or no explanation for your claim. Has no cited sources.
Rationale for Support (Evidence 3)	Provides a thoughtful, persuasive, and well-supported explanation for your claim.	Explains why you are making your claim, with some supporting reasons.	Gives a basic reason for your claim, explanation lacks depth.	Offers little or no explanation for your claim. Has no cited sources.
Counterclaim	Provides a thoughtful, persuasive, and well-supported explanation for how your counterclaim could be used against you, and why it still doesn't convince you	Explains why you are making your counterclaim, with some supporting reasons it could be used against you.	Gives a basic reason for your counterclaim, explanation lacks depth.	Offers little or no explanation for your counterclaim. Has no cited sources.
Organization Mechanics	Letter is well-organized, with clean spelling, grammar, and punctuation.	Letter is clear and organized; few spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors.	Letter is somewhat disorganized, with spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.	Letter is hard to follow or lacks structure with many spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.