**American Government**

**Ch. 6 Sec. 2**

Below is a summary of an editorial. *The New York Times* printed the original editorial on August 10, 2006. Read the summary. Then answer the questions that follow.

The Connecticut Democratic primary was a critical race. Yet only 43 percent of registered Democrats voted. This group made up 15 percent of the people in the State who were old enough to vote.

Low voter turnout is a fact in many races. As a result, voter turnout is important. If a party does a better job of getting its core supporters to the polls, it can win—even if that core group is small. And what is the best way to get your core supporters to the polls? Focus on the issues about which there is sharp disagreement. It is no surprise, then, that conflict between the parties is growing.

So what can be done? A possible solution is mandatory voting—making voting a requirement. Several countries have forms of mandatory voting. Australia is probably the best example, since it is a large country like the United States.

Australian voters must have a good excuse for not going to the polls, or they must pay a fine. This fine is about $15. The fine increases if the person does not vote in other elections. The result is a turnout rate of more than 95 percent. Rather than pay fines, voters go to the polls. Voters realize that voting is a duty, not an option. It has also made political parties focus on the bigger issues. Those in Australia know that all voters will be at the polls. The way to gain votes is to appeal to large groups of voters, not just core supporters.

If the United States had mandatory voting, there would be more progress in passing laws. Congress now spends far too much time on issues that interest few voters. Important issues like health-care reform get too little attention. Of course, mandatory voting would be a tough sell. We Americans value the freedom not to vote.

Mandatory voting comes with a price—a small loss of freedom. But mandatory voting would give new life to the center in American politics.

The original editorial was written by Norman Ornstein, a resident scholar at

the American Enterprise Institute and the co-author of *The Broken Branch: How*

*Congress Is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track.*

**1.** Voter turnout is often low. Why, in your opinion, do people choose not to vote?

**2.** Why does the writer think that mandatory voting would help the United States? Do you agree? Why or why not?

**3.** Would Australia’s system of fining those who do not vote work in the United States? Why or why not?