## Discussion Questions

# Chapter 5 Public Problems and Policy Alternatives

1. Discuss: Discuss with a neighbor, then as a class. The state of Alabama introduced proof of immigration status because it felt that the U.S. Government had failed to address the issue. Alabama immigration law required proof of immigration status (such as citizenship or legal residency) for “any transaction between a person and the state or a political subdivision of the state.” This included renewal of a driver’s license, a business license, or a vehicle registration, but also, depending on who was interpreting the law, the provision of utilities such as electricity, water, and natural gas to illegal immigrants.
   1. In your view, was this an effective policy alternative to address this policy issue?
   2. Is it appropriate for states to develop and enforce their own immigration laws?
   3. What happened in Alabama once the law began to take effect?
2. Small-group activity: Think of a topic that can be framed a variety of different ways. Using one problem (gun control, legalization of marijuana, climate change), assign small groups to take the perspective of distinct interest groups and come up with a definition of the problem.
3. Discussion: How can you recognize a credible source of information? What do you look for?
4. Small-group activity: As a class, develop a list of five public problems or issues that are important to you. These can range from local or state to federal concerns. In small groups, come up with some possible operational measures of each problem. Explore the proximate and root causes of this problem.
5. Laptop search: The health of the Great Lakes has become a major concern of surrounding states, Canada, and the U.S. government. Explore the value of the news sources to provide a general understanding of a given problem, in this case, protecting the Great Lakes.
   1. Form small groups and conduct an Internet search of major newspapers, networks, and other news sources.
   2. What comes up? Is it legitimate information? What types of sources have weighed in on the issue? What is your general sense of this issue? What unanswered questions do you have?
6. Class discussion: How might government use these different tools? Consider authority tools, inducements or sanctions, capacity building, hortatory, and learning tools. Consider a specific problem, such as the use of cell phones or texting by drivers. Which of these tools might be the most effective in reducing cell phone use or texting by drivers? Why do you think so? Or consider the case of immigration reform discussed at the beginning of this chapter: Which of these tools can help reduce the rate of illegal immigration or address another component of the problem?
7. Class discussion for use with video resources: Discuss as a class which policy tools from the list in Table 5.1 are in evidence in each video.
8. Discuss: States are often innovators or early adopters of policies that are later embraced by the federal government. For example, in the early 1990s, the state of Wisconsin developed several innovative approaches to welfare reform called W2. Some of Wisconsin’s methods were employed later by the Clinton administration in its major welfare overhaul in 1996. Which other states are innovating in various areas that might be useful to federal policy makers? (Consider immigration, marijuana, marriage equality, climate change, more.)