

## Levels of Government: *Bria Studies a Map*

Bria was born in Minnesota and she is getting ready to vote. Her husband is serving in the Army in Afghanistan, and she is very concerned about his safety, and the war. Bria is taking a course in history at the community college. And, she is trying to decide whom to vote for in the upcoming election.

Last week her class listened to candidates who were having a debate. Bria listened carefully but she was confused. The candidates gave their opinions about schools, parks, and libraries. Bria wanted to know their opinions about the fighting in Afghanistan, but they didn't talk about war.

Bria asked her teacher, John, why the candidates didn't talk about war. Her teacher explained that these candidates don't make decisions about war. The candidates in this debate are running for the city government, and they make decisions about things in the city, like schools, parks, and libraries.

John said the President and the United States Congress are in Washington D.C. They represent the people of their states to make decisions about things that affect the entire country. Some of these issues are war, defense and national security, trade between countries, immigration, health care and Social Security. Minnesota has two Senators and eight Representatives in the Congress that help make these decisions.

In Minnesota, the capitol is in St Paul. Citizens of Minnesota elect Representatives and a Governor. These people make decisions about the welfare of Minnesota residents, state roads and bridges, road safety, driver's licenses, and many other things.

There are other levels of government. Citizens elect representatives to these governments, also. Here are some of the levels of government and the titles of the elected officials.

**United States of America**  
President & Vice President  
U.S Senators  
U.S. Representatives

**State of Minnesota**  
Governor  
State Senators  
State Representatives

**City or Town**  
Mayor  
City Council

"That helps me understand the levels of government, and what are some of their responsibilities," said Bria. "Now I need to write a letter to the President, my U.S. Senators and my U.S. Representative to tell them my opinion about the war in Afghanistan.

"And, said Bria, "I am also concerned about climate change. Should I write a letter to the government in Washington, Minnesota or my city?" "Excellent question," said John. "Climate change affects everyone in all places. I think you should write to elected officials in Washington, Minnesota AND your city." Bria has learned that democracy in the United States is government "of the people, by the people and for the people." She knows that voting is one of the rights and responsibilities in a democracy. And she will vote!



## Questions for discussion: *Bria Studies a Map*

1. What did Bria want to learn from the candidate's debate? Did she get the information she wanted? Why or why not?
2. What are the elected officials called in the federal government in Washington? What are some of the responsibilities of the federal elected officials? Are there elections for any of these officials this year?
3. What are the officials called that voters choose in the Minnesota state government? What are some of the responsibilities of these officials? Are there elections for any of these officials this year?
4. What are some of the responsibilities of the elected officials in the city government? Are there elections for any of these offices this year?
5. Who does Bria need to write about her concern for her husband and the war in Afghanistan?
6. Who should she contact about her concern for climate change?
7. Can you name the candidates, or the existing person, for President? U.S. House of Representatives? U.S. Senate? Minnesota Governor? Your city Mayor?
8. What do you think Bria can do, in addition to voting, to be responsible citizens? What can you do?