Background:

Americans are governed by a representative versus a direct or participatory democracy. In a direct democracy all eligible citizens would be involved in the governing of the country. In a representative democracy such as ours, eligible citizens elect certain officials to represent them in the governance of the country. As French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote:

"In the strict sense of the term, a true democracy has never existed and never will."

_The Social Contract, 1762_

Instructions:

Suppose that the people of the United States decided to prove Rousseau wrong and establish a true direct democracy. What would be the impact of this on our government at the national level?

1. On your own paper, make three columns. In the first column, list the following situations. Next to each, in the second column, list the characteristics of each situation as it currently exists under our representative democracy. In the third column, list the characteristics of each situation under a direct democracy.

   a. The selection of national public officials
   b. The creation, enforcement, and interpretation of the national laws
   c. The performance of each citizen's civic duty. What do citizens need to do to be functionally active in the nation's government? How much time is required on either a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly basis to do this?

2. Given your responses to the above situations, would you like to live under a system of direct democracy? Why or why not? Is Rousseau right—will a true democracy never exist? Explain.