

A Coach's Notes¹

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Resolved: That the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) should be significantly expanded.

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Introduction

This is the fifth edition of the 2007-08 CDA season. If you would like to receive the previous editions of these Notes, please email me and I will send them to you. Accompanying this document are my notes from the final round in two formats, transcript and flow chart, and a copy of the packet from the tournament. I try to email these to CDA coaches within two weeks of the tournament.

These notes are intended for your benefit in coaching your teams and for the students to use directly. I hope that you will find them useful teaching tools. Please feel free to make copies and distribute them to your debaters.

I appreciate any feedback you have, good and bad. The best comments and suggestions will find their way into subsequent issues. I would also consider publishing signed, reasoned comments or replies from coaches or students in subsequent issues. So if you'd like to sound off on some aspect of the debate topic or the CDA, send me an email.

And Still More Introductions

While I admire courtesy as much as anyone, CDA debaters may be overdoing it a bit. Every speaker seems to feel the need to reintroduce themselves at the beginning of every speech in the debate. Sometimes they feel the need to reintroduce their partner, too, and even to re-state the resolution. As a former debater and long-time judge I say to you all, "Once is enough!"

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The first speaker on each team should introduce themselves, their partner, name the school they represent and state the resolution. The classic opening sentences are:

“Good morning. My name is Sarah Eloquent, and my partner is Jim Expressive, representing Debaters High School. Today, we are resolved, that the State Children’s Health Insurance Program should be significantly expanded. By this we mean...”

Because the Affirmative has stated the resolution, the First Negative may do so for emphasis, but it is not required. The First Negative could simply open with:

“Good morning. I am Fred Wellspoken, the First Negative speaker from the Middletown Forensic School. My partner, Ellen Articulate and I agree with the Affirmative definitions. Let me give you three reasons why we oppose this resolution...”

A single introduction satisfies the requirements of etiquette. The judge and your opponents know who you are and where you are from and that information was on the schedule and you wrote it on the blackboard and the judge wrote it on the ballot. You really don’t need to remind everyone another three times per team. For example, the Second Affirmative might simply start with:

“I’m going to do two things in my constructive: review the two contentions my opponent just presented and then reply to his response to my partner’s speech.”

And then you are off. You can do this for all of the speeches, only bringing in a full statement of the resolution if you feel it is needed to emphasize your argument or as part of your summary. You will probably save 15-30 seconds per speech. That may not seem like much, but remember that your time is limited.

Bad Introductions

There is one more thing you should consider about your first words and last words and all those in between. At least once every tournament I hear someone start a rebuttal with something like “Hi. I’m Sam Sadsack again for Bored High School to negate the resolution that we are all probably tired of hearing by now.” In 40 years of public speaking I’ve learned that enthusiasm is an important ingredient making an effective presentation. If you aren’t excited by what you are saying, how can you possibly expect your audience or the judge to be excited?

If you speak with animation and purpose the judge is more likely to believe what you say. I understand that judges are supposed to look past the surface and consider your arguments as the most important factor in their decision, but judges are only human. Enthusiasm, like being appropriately dressed, speaking in complete sentences, pronouncing words clearly, standing straight and so forth, affects how the judge perceives what you say. My guess is that the less experienced the judge, the more important these other factors will be to your winning the round.

You shouldn’t gush or be giddy or overly emotional. You have to find a style that works for you. But whatever that style is, you need to convince the judge it is worth his or her time to listen to you. You have something serious to say about an important issue.

So, you didn’t get much sleep the night before because you had to get up at 6AM to catch the bus to the tournament. Outside it’s a beautiful day with blue sky and bright sunshine and there are fifteen other things you could have been done besides debate. It’s the third

round and you're not sure the first two went very well. Put it all out of your mind! When you stand up to speak, look right at the judge, smile, and make him or her think there is no other place you'd rather be and nothing else you'd rather be doing than demonstrating weakness of your opponents' case and explaining the strength of your own.

Citing Evidence

In this month's final round both teams cited the same source to support and oppose the resolution. I've heard the very same source referred to in almost every CDA tournament that I've attended in the past ten years. This deeply learned, Renaissance individual does not appear to have a name, but instead goes by the rather mysterious title, "The Packet."

A review of all the packets I have collected over the years shows each to be composed of several different articles. Some are balanced; others clearly favor one side or the other. Some have clear biases, such as The Heritage Foundation (conservative) or the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (liberal) articles in this month's packet. All of the articles, especially when they present studies or statistics, usually cite a further source.

As I've discussed before,² the limited research resources that CDA extemporaneous debate allows for provides a certain leeway in presenting evidence, including introducing evidence from one's own knowledge. But there is no excuse for not properly citing the hard evidence that you have. "The Packet" is not a valid reference, page number or not.

A proper citation would be something like one of the following:

- "In the packet, The Heritage Foundation says..."
- "The Washington Times articles tells us..."
- "The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities cites CBO statistics that show..."

If the packet material is not properly identified, then you should still distinguish where in the packet it comes from by the title of that section. If you are quoting from the almanac or a dictionary, say so.

Good evidence helps to build your case. Your argument is the basic building block. Evidence, well-chosen and explained, supports the argument. Proper citation gives evidence credibility. Which do you think is more convincing to a judge, "On page 6 of the packet it says..." or one of the examples above?

Counterplans

The Negative case in the final round at Wilton was based on a counterplan. The Negative carefully used cross-ex to set up their counterplan by asking the Affirmative specific questions about the characteristics of SCHIP. Once the Affirmative committed to particular definition, the Negative highlighted a counterplan different from SCHIP and proceeded to claim that several significant advantages flowed from those differences. It was very nicely done.

The final round provides an excellent example of the use of a counterplan in CDA extemporaneous debate. Let's use it to examine three questions. Why should a Negative

² See *A Coach's Notes* for December 2007.

team use a counterplan? How should one use a counterplan? How can an Affirmative team defend against a counterplan?

Why Use a Counterplan?

The Affirmative team is usually supporting a change in the status quo, while the Negative team defends it. In presenting its case, the Affirmative will generally show need (a problem to be solved), inherency (the status quo cannot solve the problem), solvency (adopting the resolution will solve the problem) and perhaps some additional benefits that might come from adopting the resolution.

The first decision the Negative must make is whether to accept the existence of the need or to argue against it. There was evidence against the need in this month's packet. Many uninsured children already qualify for SCHIP but for various reason their parents don't use it. Many uninsured children are in families that could afford private insurance but again their parents choose not to obtain it. Finally, many children are in families caught between jobs that provide health insurance, and so are only temporarily uninsured.

Most Negative teams will choose to argue against inherency. If SCHIP simply needs more funds to cover those eligible, increased funding is generally considered a minor adjustment to the status quo: SCHIP is sound, it just needs to be properly funded. Similarly, if parents are failing to take advantage of the health insurance available to them, perhaps outreach is needed to educate them. Again, no new program of health insurance is needed, just better advertising and targeting of the ones that already exist.

(Note that both teams need to have considered what "significantly expanded" means with respect to SCHIP. We will see below that this was a critical issue in the final round.)

This month the Negative teams that I saw largely agreed that the current state of health insurance for children was unsatisfactory. Most Negative teams presented likely harms of an expanded government program and proposed a variety of better ways to deal with the problem. Only the Negative team in the final round proposed a formal counterplan.

If the Negative team presents alternative ways to fill the need, isn't that a counterplan? Yes and no. A counterplan is whatever you choose call one. Spending more money on existing programs or enforcing existing regulations more carefully, or advertising existing health care options more aggressively to parents could be called a counterplan.

Personally, I draw the line using the issue of inherency and the test of significance. If the Negative team not only agrees with the need, but also agrees with the inherency argument that the existing system cannot solve the problem, then the Negative alternative should probably be called a counterplan. If the alternatives proposed are significantly different from the status quo, consisting of more than just extra money through existing channels and enforcement of existing laws then it should also probably be called a counterplan.

If the Negative team agrees there is a harm that the status quo cannot deal with, then the Negative probably has to propose an alternative to both the status quo and the resolution. The Negative will want to make this clear to the judge, otherwise it may sound as if they are agreeing with the Affirmative completely. Calling the Negative alternative to the resolution a counterplan helps to make the nature of its attack clear. If the Negative has accepted need and inherency, but does not present a counterplan, the only arguments the

Negative has left are that either that the Affirmative case does not encompass the resolution (topicality), that adopting the resolution will not resolve the harm (solvency), or that adopting the resolution will cause harms that outweigh any benefit.

How Do You Use a Counterplan?

If the Negative is going to present a counterplan it should do so in the First Negative Constructive. I've seen Negative teams scramble to do so in the Second Negative Constructive, but at that point generally too much of the debate has gone by for the counterplan to be effective. The Affirmative has had two constructive speeches to advance the resolution. A counterplan in the Second Negative Constructive also looks like it is abandoning the material presented in the First Negative Constructive.

The counterplan needs to be clearly distinguished from the resolution. The Negative has agreed with the Affirmative harm, and has agreed the status quo cannot alleviate it. If the counterplan sounds too much like the resolution, the Affirmative may argue that the Negative essentially supports the resolution. The Negative must be able to demonstrate that adopting the counterplan is not the same as adopting the resolution or it will be conceding the debate to the Affirmative.

The Negative team in this month's final round set the groundwork for their counterplan when they cross examined the First Affirmative. They asked whether SCHIP as advocated by the Affirmative was basically the same as that described in the articles in the packet. The Affirmative said it was, the only difference being that the source of funding might not be a tobacco tax. The Negative then asked the Affirmative if SCHIP benefits differed by income within a state. The Affirmative said that it differed by states, but was constant within any single state. In these answers the Affirmative limited themselves to a SCHIP that worked in a particular way, defining a term they had not defined in their constructive speech.

The Negative based their counterplan on this detailed definition. The First Negative said they could solve the child health insurance problem at no extra cost to the current system by using a subsidy that varied by income level. They backed this with data from articles in the packet that showed the greater the income level the more likely the family either had or could afford private health insurance. They emphasized this difference and reinforced the evidence for the rest of the debate, ultimately winning the round.

How Do You Defend Against a Counterplan?

The choices the Affirmative has to respond to a counterplan are the same as those for the Negative in responding to a plan or to the resolution: failure to alleviate the need, harms that exceed the benefits or inefficiency compared to the alternatives. In presenting a counterplan, the Negative, like the Affirmative, must demonstrate solvency and any additional benefits they wish to claim for the counterplan. Both teams have the burden to demonstrate that what they advocate is reasonable. Since the Affirmative has presumably done the same for their plan (or for adopting the resolution if they have not presented a specific plan), both teams must contrast one to the other along these three dimensions. The Affirmative needs to take up the stock Negative arguments and apply them to the Negative counterplan.

The Affirmative has another option when attacking a Negative counterplan. The biggest risk that the Negative takes in presenting a counterplan is that in presenting it they have agreed with two-thirds of the Affirmative case, need and inherency. If the Affirmative can show that the Negative counterplan is contained within the bounds of the resolution, then everything the Negative has said with respect to its counterplan can be claimed as favoring the resolution. Just as the Negative can argue topicality—that the Affirmative case does not encompass the resolution in its entirety—so the Affirmative can argue that the Negative counterplan is a really the same as adopting the resolution.

This is not as far fetched as it may sound. In the final round, the Negative clearly said they had no problem with the existing SCHIP program. The Negative counterplan essentially expands SCHIP to higher income brackets, like the proposed legislation, but varies the benefit by income. The Affirmative could have made a strong argument that this is essentially a significant expansion of SCHIP by making government provided or subsidized health insurance available to children and families in higher income brackets.

The Importance of Defining Terms

The viability of the Negative counterplan in this month's final round turned on a clear definition of what is SCHIP and what constitutes a significant expansion of SCHIP. What is the essence of SCHIP? Is SCHIP a program that provides health insurance on the same basis for all children and adults who are eligible? This is a very narrow definition. Or is SCHIP a program that provides government health insurance as opposed to private health insurance to those children who are eligible? Or is SCHIP a program where the government helps those in need obtain health insurance in some form? There are always choices to be made in definitions, even in resolutions that seem clear cut.

In four rounds I did not hear one Affirmative team define terms. Only in the final round did the Negative take advantage of this, using cross-ex to get the Affirmative to implicitly define terms in a way that the Negative used to its advantage. Suppose the Affirmative had said that "a significant expansion of SCHIP" was any substantial increase of government-supported health insurance to children in higher income brackets? How would the debate have gone in that case?

The Need for Flexibility

My guess is that 99 out of 100 times in CDA debate, the Negative team presents the contentions that they devise during prep time. The Negative devised those contentions in answer to the Affirmative case they prepared at the same time. If only we could debate ourselves, we would always be well prepared.

The most important thing that you do during a debate is listening to your opponents. Granted they have the same resolution and packet and resources that you have, but they are not you. Their read of the material and interpretation of the resolution may not match your own. You may have prepared the perfect answers to your own case, but those answers may not match the case of your opponents at all.

The Negative team can never know what its contentions will be until it has heard the First Affirmative constructive speech. The Negative should try to come up with four or five contentions during prep time, including some against Affirmative cases it thinks possible

but that the Negative may not choose to use themselves. The Negative should then choose the contentions it will use based on what it hears from the Affirmative. The Negative should also adjust the wording of its contentions and their supporting arguments based on the Affirmative presentation.

The Affirmative has to be mindful that the Negative may not present the arguments that it expects, as happened in this month's final round. Just as the Negative has to adjust its attack once it learns the Affirmative case, so the Affirmative must adapt to the Negative reply. Debate the round you are in, not the round you planned for.

Capitalism vs. Democracy

Just as there are stock arguments—need, inherency, solvency, benefits, topicality—that you need to master, there are also stock issues such as cost, efficiency, rights and so forth. Stock issues come up repeatedly under different topics, and like stock arguments can be adapted and applied to circumstances. As a debater you should spend time developing an understanding of these stock issues and how to argue them on both sides of the topic.

I'd like to briefly talk about one stock issue in February's debate, government versus private action. In many policy debates the resolution is a call for government action to provide goods or services that could also be provided by private firms. One of the basic points of contention in the public debate over SCHIP—and all US healthcare—is whether the system should be primarily a government or a private one. Note that there are multiple choices here: a program entirely run by the government (e.g., like veterans hospitals); a program where the government pays but the services are provided by private firms (e.g., like Medicaid or Medicare), or a program that is entirely privately run and funded (like most work-related health insurance), or some combination of these.

Generally the case for government action is easy to envision: there a problem, so pass a law, set up a program, spend some money and fix it. The mechanism of private enterprise is a bit murkier. People need goods or services, others people have goods or services to sell or are willing to produce them, somehow they find each other, a bargain is struck, and commerce occurs. The result is profit or loss, companies and jobs created, growing economies, and increased standard of living. But for too many of us, it's like Geoffrey Rush' character in the movie *Shakespeare in Love* says, "Things work out. I don't know why. It's a mystery!"

As a debater, you need a general understanding of the debate over public versus private approaches to national problems. There are many ways you can contrast them. I'll consider a few of them.

First, note that I've used the term "free enterprise" as opposed to "capitalism." "Capitalism" is at best a neutral term these days in most conversations. Similarly, "children's health insurance" sounds better than "government-provided health insurance," even if SCHIP in fact covers adults in some cases. Which sounds better to you? Word choice has an impact on the effectiveness of your arguments.

Second, nothing happens because we will it, or because a law is passed. Public or private activity requires that managers and workers be hired, space be found, supplies be purchased, and standards and procedures be set. The two sectors differ in the personnel

they can attract, how they acquire and pay for resources, how standards and procedures are set, and so forth. These differences will determine how effective a program will be.

Third, if you build it they may come in a movie, but real people tend to be a bit more independent minded. At least you need to find a way to let people know that the program is there. Once they know it's there, they may have to be convinced or incentivized to use it. Just because you think it's a good program doesn't mean everyone else will, any more than everyone agrees with your choice in ice cream.

Fourth, you may not get it right the first time. The product and services may not match the intended consumers. The policies and procedures may need to be rewritten. Someone involved in the program has to realize changes are needed and have the desire and the authority to make them, as well as the funds to pay for them.

Fifth, everyone involved needs to have an incentive to work towards the proper result, whatever their roll. Laws need to be enforced, and history shows that if people don't approve of a law not only will they not obey it, but they won't enforce it either. Think about speed limits on highways. Employees can do their jobs enthusiastically and with care, or they can simply go through the paces, or they can actively sabotage what they are supposed to do.

Sixth, you need to match resources with needs. How much health insurance is enough? Does everyone need the same coverage? No system is going to do this perfectly. There will always be some waste and some need that isn't met. The choices available will not be ideal for everyone.

Finally, you need to consider what place choice should play in the system, and at what level. Should individuals make the choices? Should choices be made through the give and take of the market? Or should the choice be made democratically, through elected representatives? Given our multilayered system of government, should the decision be made at the Federal, state or local level? How much of the day-to-day decision making will be delegated to a government or corporate bureaucracy or the market?

There are many more differences, and to be fair many similarities, between private and public approaches to problems. The modern debate on this issue goes back to English and French political scientists and politicians in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the US and Britain there are political parties thought to largely embody one approach or the other, though in each case it is more a matter of emphasis than dogma.

As a debater you will face the question of private versus public solutions over and over again. Although the problem area will differ each time, questions like those above will help you develop your arguments. Thinking about those questions and collecting examples that illustrate your answers before the tournaments are ways that you can improve your extemporaneous debating skills.