# A Coach's Notes[1]

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### Connecticut Debate Association
### Fairfield Warde High School, King School and Ridgefield High School
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### Resolved: States and municipalities should not provide economic subsidies or incentives to corporations.

**Contents**



## Introduction

This is the January edition of the 2013-14 CDA season. Previous year's editions can be found through the Training Materials page on the CDA web site. Accompanying this document are my notes from the final round at Fairfield Warde High School presented in two formats, transcript and flow chart.

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 would like to reply to my comments or sound off on some aspect of the debate topic or the CDA, I look forward to your email.

## Explain

The theme this month is "explain." You should know by now that debates are won by the team that does the better job of explaining their position. Facts rarely convince the judge which side to vote for. There are several good reasons for this.

First, debate topics are chosen from among issues that are ambiguous, undecided or undecidable. If this were not true, the resolution would not be debatable. It would be clear that one side had an insurmountable advantage either because the decision is clear or because the decision has already been made. If facts existed that proved the resolution true or false, why debate?

Second, a packet of 10-12 pages can never be more than a brief introduction to any serious subject, and anyway is structured to be balanced between the two sides. If you had longer to do your own research you might develop an information advantage over your opponents, but given my previous point, your opponent could do the same thing. If both of you are relying primarily on the packet and your own knowledge, you will find facts and examples to support each side. Either way, facts should lead to stalemate.

Third, facts and examples are rarely clear cut. They can usually support multiple points of view depending on the interpretation, which is another way of saying that facts need to be explained. Not only do the facts and examples need to be explained, but you need to explain why they support the argument you are trying to make.

Debaters often talk about "proof" as in, "the Aff/Neg didn't prove their argument/case," or in cross-ex, "do you have any proof for (something or other)?" This isn't particularly useful. Your opponents don't have "proof" any more than you do. But they may have a better explanation, and that's what you need to deal with.

## What Is Your Repeat Factor?

If explanation is the key to winning debates, it follows that any time you spend not explaining something is time wasted. A corollary is that any time spent explaining the same thing over again probably doesn't advance your case either.

One phrase you see often in debate textbooks is "extending an argument." This essentially means elaborating on the explanations that have been offered by both sides in the round so far and adding something to them. This might be a clarification of a point that has been confused or misinterpreted, a reply to counter something presented by your opponents, a reinterpretation of evidence presented, further reasoning behind your own case, or a combination of materials presented by both sides, all to support your own position. The one thing it does not mean is simply re-stating something that has been said before.

You will repeat things. Some repetition is good: for example repeating an argument as a preface to further analysis. But many things I hear debaters say just waste speaking time. The three most common examples are introducing yourself at the beginning of every speech, reciting the resolution at the beginning of every speech, and re-stating your contentions.

If your judge doesn't know who you and your partner are after your team's first constructive, he probably doesn't care. Besides, you did write your names on the board, didn't you, so the judge could write them on the ballot? Similarly, everyone knows what the resolution is after the first speech (even more so by the third round of the day).

I think these two are just bad habits, like saying "um" or "like" when you are searching for the right word while speaking. The first few sentences of any speech are the hardest,

and the lazy thing to do is to re-introduce yourself and re-state the resolution each time. Once you've started speaking the rest flows more easily. You learned how to stop saying "um." With a little practice you can learn how to launch your speeches more effectively. One trick is to memorize the first two or three sentences you plan to use—something you can do rather than rise when you still have 15 seconds of prep time left.

The third, repeating your contentions, is more serious. Simply re-stating your contentions doesn't help your case. It provides no reason to persuade the judge that the contention is true, no reason explaining how the contention supports the resolution and no reason why the contention counters an argument presented by your opponents.

You are never so far ahead in a debate that you won't benefit by adding a bit of explanation every time you touch an argument, either yours or your opponents. Judges also know that when you are just repeating yourself to fill time. You will find your speaker points will rise when you do more than state a contention.

When you review your debates after the tournament, look through your notes for those places where you, your partner or your opponents (yes, your opponents) simply repeated something. Consider how you might have used the time better, what you might have added or said instead. Explanation is in part just another habit. You need to practice it until it becomes second nature.

# The Clash of Examples

## *(or When Is a Counterplan Not a Counterplan?)*

In the final round at Warde the Negative team presented a counterplan that wasn't really a counterplan. I will explain that in a bit, but the details help illuminate some of my points regarding explanations and facts. Essentially the Negative counterplan was a superior explanation of the facts presented in the debate, and that explanation won the round for them.

The central point of clash was whether or not subsidies to corporations were effective in creating jobs. The Aff pointed to the examples from the packet of Jackson Laboratories and CIGNA in Connecticut and an Oklahoma program to show that states have overpaid for the jobs created. The Neg preferred Kentucky and Virginia, where the programs created more jobs at lower cost. There was some mention of the auto company bailouts, but they were Federal programs not really pertinent to the resolution. And the packet has quite a few more examples[2] on both sides that weren't used. So basically, as noted above, it was a CT/OK vs KY/VA stalemate!

Not exactly. The Neg did something the Aff did not do. The Neg presented a reason why subsidies were effective in some cases and failed in others: better management. This is the heart of the Negative counterplan: provide corporate subsidies under carefully controlled circumstances where job creation is monitored closely and money is only disbursed after the fact. This counterplan may have been suggested by the second article in the packet. But that article only identifies the characteristics of successful programs—

[2] Now that you have the time, read through the packet carefully, list every example you can find, and classify it as to whether it supports the Aff or the Neg. You will find that this is a good exercise.

reasonable price per job created—not what the states with successful programs did to make them successful. The Neg takes that factor and extrapolates it to "make the corporations earn the subsidies," showing some real creativity. Now rather than a stalemate, the Neg has "here's why KY/VA worked and CT/OK didn't, and there is no reason subsidies can't be successful if other states implement their programs correctly." That's a winning argument, with explanation topping facts.

I have a couple of further observations. First, this isn't exactly a counterplan. Rather, the Neg showed the Aff case failed to show inherency. A counterplan is a proposal to do something that is not currently being done in the status quo and not required by the resolution. For example, a counterplan might be something like taking all the funds spend on corporate subsidies and using it for college scholarships as a better way to create jobs and improve the economy. (That doesn't quite fit in the context of this debate, but it fits the definition of a counterplan.)

The Neg here demonstrates that there is no reason state subsidies to corporations can't succeed: the programs just need to be run with the proper discipline. They claim this is the reason why some states have spent their money better than others. Unless the Aff can present a reason why subsidies are inherently ineffective, that is they can't work on principle, they haven't made their case.

Second, you might think that this means the Neg wins if there are any counter-examples to the Aff position. After all, if one subsidy program in one state for one corporation worked once, well then, just run them all that way. This isn't so, and to see why you must understand that debate is about competing explanations. There may be reasons why the one success was just a fluke, or why, while there may be both successes and failures, failures are likely to predominate.

For example, the first Aff contention is that subsidy programs permit corporations to hold states hostage. Essentially, since corporations can shop around from state to state, they will look for the best deal, and threaten to leave if the money doesn't keep coming. To retain existing firms (or to attract new firms, the argument works just as well for either case) states will try to outbid one another. Since politicians reap the immediate gain, and the true cost and benefit is hard to measure and only known years later, there is a tendency to overbid (see "winner's curse" below). So even if subsidies work occasionally, the incentives in the process are such that on balance states will fail to manage the programs as effectively ultimately overpay for jobs. This defeats the Negative argument above by explaining that most states most of the time won't be able to maintain the required discipline for a successful subsidy program.

Few things in life—and almost nothing we debate about—work with mechanical precision. If you do nothing for people with infections, some will still live. If you give them all antibiotics, some will still die. And some will be allergic to the antibiotics and directly harmed by them. But on balance those with antibiotics will be better off because infections are caused by germs and antibiotics kill the germs and the allergies can be managed. You win debates by explaining why, on balance, we will be better off adopting your side of the resolution, even if counter-examples exist.

Finally, explanations are more valuable than facts. You can store them up and apply them to different cases. For example, the packet is not clear on the point that certain

states have procedures in place to manage their subsidy programs properly, only that some states seem to have paid a far lower price per job created than others. But good management is a reasonable explanation of the result, and the concept of good vs bad management can be applied to many of the topics we have debated over the years.

Similarly, nothing in the packet suggests that the "winner's curse" operated in those states that paid too much per job. But there are statements by Gov. Malloy that the states have to bid against each other for corporate investment. Uncertainty and disagreement about the true costs and benefits of these sorts of projects which take years to complete is also suggested in the packet. Finally, the tendency of politician—all of us, really—to overestimate the benefits of program they favor is just part of human nature. The winner's curse occurs in a bidding situation when the winner finds out he has overpaid after all the excitement is over.

The facts of your next debate will change. Ideas, like proper management, winner's curse, uncertainty and venality, may still apply.

## Following Up

A proper debriefing should be part of every team's post-tournament activities. I've mentioned a number of things debaters should do: review each debate and ballot, find ways to improve the arguments you made and answer the arguments you couldn't, re-read the packet in detail, look up anything you didn't know or understand. One more task is to come up with ideas, arguments and explanations that you can use again.

Sometimes you will have to step back from the debate and ask yourself if you really understood what you were debating about. Do you really know what a subsidy is? Or a corporation? You may know some specific examples, but do you really know a good general definition? The different varieties? The history of the concept? The theory explaining how they are supposed to work or why they might fail? The Wikipedia article on most topics is a good place to start.

Sometimes we feed you the ideas, holding them out on a plate for you to grasp. Educators are like that. The end of this month's packet has brief excerpts for "subsidy," "externality," "winner's curse," "zero sum game" and "prisoner's dilemma." They can all be applied to this month's topic, and you should figure out how. But they can be applied in many more situations, and are worth understanding in their own right.

Enjoy!