

A Coach's Notes¹

Everett Rutan

Xavier High School

everett.rutan@moodys.com or ejrutan3@acm.org

Connecticut Debate Association

Joel Barlow High School and King School

January 9, 2010

Resolved: The US should respond to global warming by instituting a significant reduction in carbon emissions.

Contents

- Introduction
- Final Round Critique, by Kathryn Kernoff, AITE
- Hold That Thought
- Coaching at the Tournament

Introduction

This is the fourth edition of the 2009-10 CDA season. You can find previous editions on the CDA website, <http://ctdebate.org> through the training materials page. 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 Notes 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 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.

Final Round Critique

Kathryn Kernoff was one of five judges on the panel for the final round at King School. Kathryn is a former debater for Valley High School (IA) and Dartmouth College where she reached the final round of the CEDA national tournament three years in a row. She currently works with the debate team at AITE.

¹ Copyright 2010 Everett Rutan, all rights reserved, except for the Final Round Critique, copyright 2010 Kathryn Kernoff. This document may be freely copied for non-profit, educational purposes. The opinions expressed herein are those of authors alone and do not represent the views of nor have they been endorsed by Xavier High School, the Connecticut Debate Association, Moody's Investors Service or any other party.

To help you understand Kathryn's comments, there is a table at the end of her remarks which lists the Affirmative and Negative contentions. You may also refer to Everett's notes on the debate in the associated Final Round files.

The Negative won the final round on a 3-2 vote.

I voted negative in the final round. Here is my analysis of the debate, followed by some lessons that I drew from it.

There were two main questions in the debate:

1. Will the affirmative do something meaningful about global warming?
2. Will the affirmative help or hurt the economy?

Although the affirmative's second contention was about international cooperation, there was never any explanation of why this contention was important aside from global warming. As a result, it basically merged with the third contention.

The first question was whether the affirmative does something meaningful about global warming. The affirmative clearly won the argument that humans are responsible for global climate change and that we should care about the future generations affected by global warming. However, they made a strategic miscalculation in the 2AR² when they conceded that the response to global warming must be a global effort. Although the affirmative pointed to the Kyoto Protocol as an example of successful global cooperation, the negative successfully explained that developing nations have a strong incentive to avoid agreeing to anything because they depend on fossil fuels as a cheap energy source for growth. (In fact, the only reason most developing nations agreed to the Kyoto Protocol is the fact that there was no binding commitment for non-Annex I³ countries like India and China).

By conceding that a global effort is necessary, the affirmative debaters placed an unnecessarily large burden on themselves. Instead, they could have claimed that even without cooperation from China, the US can still make a big dent in the problem. Sure, the US can't solve global warming on its own but it can make the effects less severe than they would otherwise be.

The second question was whether the affirmative will help or hurt the economy. The affirmative argued that the plan will create jobs in the alternative energy sector. The negative argued that it will take just as many jobs away from the fossil fuel sector. Although the affirmative pointed out their plan is gradual and will not entirely end the oil industry, it's unclear how any approach to global warming would not reduce the demand for fossil fuels and, by extension, the jobs in that sector. The cap and trade approach that the affirmative defended would definitely reduce fossil fuel jobs (that's what the cap is for).

² "2AR" is the Second Affirmative Rebuttal, "1NC" is the First Negative Constructive, and so forth.

³ "Annex I" countries are the 37 industrialized countries who committed themselves to reducing their output of four greenhouse gases. Non-Annex-I countries are generally the less developed countries.

The affirmative also made the smart argument that fossil fuels are finite and will run out inevitably. While this was mentioned briefly in cross-examination, it was a new argument in the 2AR. Also, that argument doesn't prove that the plan has economic benefits, it just disproves the economic costs.

At the end of the debate, the negative hadn't really shown that the plan was bad but they definitely proved it would be ineffective. The plan would not solve the problem of global warming and would not create any net jobs. It might exacerbate the recession. The plan is no better than and very possibly worse than the status quo.

Lessons from the final round:

1. Make "even if" arguments. There are few, if any, debates where one team wins every single point of clash. Recognize that you won't win all of your arguments and explain why you still win the debate. The affirmative could have won by adding only one argument to the 2AR: "Even if other countries don't cooperate, the US will still make a difference." You can still argue that other countries will cooperate but this covers your back if they don't.
2. Arguments about creating or destroying jobs are usually fallacious. As the negative successfully pointed out in this debate, a job created in one place means a job destroyed in another. Economists sometimes called this the "broken window fallacy." If someone runs around breaking a bunch of windows, that creates jobs for window repairers. That doesn't mean breaking windows is good for the economy. If people didn't have to hire window repairers, they would do something more productive with their money instead. That's true of most claims of job creation and job destruction
3. Don't just debate the details of your contentions; talk about why they matter. The affirmative never talked about why international cooperation was important (except insofar as it was redundant with the global warming contention). The affirmative could have explained why it's important for the US to demonstrate its willingness to cooperate because it secures cooperation on other issues in return. This could be a benefit of the plan even if it failed to solve global warming. I should note that affirmative did do a good job of talking about the importance of global warming and the negative did a good job talking about why we should not prolong the recession.

Affirmative Contentions:
<i>1. The economic benefits of limiting carbon emissions outweigh the cost.</i>
<i>2. US action will improve our international relations.</i>
<i>3. It is an essential human responsibility to sustain the environment.</i>
Negative Contentions:
<i>1. The US economy can't afford a CO2 reduction initiative.</i>
<i>2. There is no feasible way to reduce CO2 emissions.</i>
<i>3. Reducing carbon emissions can't fall on the US alone; it must be a global effort.</i>

Kathryn's comments are the sort every debater would like to see on their ballot. First, she identifies the key issues in the debate. Note that these are not the same as the contentions advanced by either team. Second, she weighs the arguments advanced on

each key issue explaining her reasoning. Third, she gives a precise reason for her decision. Finally, she gives several suggestions for improvement that arise from what she saw in the debate. This is a good checklist for any judge to follow when filling out a ballot.

Debaters should also note that Kathryn's analysis of the issues is a perfect Second Negative Rebuttal. These last rebuttals should be dedicated to identifying the key points of dispute and explaining how the conflicting arguments boil down to a decision in your favor. Obviously a perfect Second Affirmative Rebuttal would emphasize different points, weigh the arguments differently and come to a different conclusion. Remember the decision was 3-2, which means that two judges would present an alternative critique.

Hold That Thought

Debate is about precise expression: say what you mean and mean what you say. Debaters should listen closely to their opponents to make sure they hear the arguments their opponents actually make. Too often, debaters are looking for their opponents to make particular arguments in response to their own contentions, and give their opponents credit for more effective arguments than their opponents have actually made.

Let me explain this by referring to one of the rounds I judged at King School on Saturday. The table below gives you the Affirmative and Negative contentions, and the Second Affirmative's responses to the Negative contentions. I will refer to particular arguments by their codes, e.g. A1, N2 or RN3.

Affirmative Contentions

A1: The economy and the environment will suffer if the US does not limit carbon emissions.

A2: The US has a moral duty to set an example.

A3: It is more cost effective to act now than to act later.

Negative Contentions:

N1: There is no international agency that can enforce limits on carbon emissions.

N2: No developing nation will agree to limit carbon emissions.

N3: The developed economies will be harmed locally by the limits on carbon emissions.

Aff Responses to Negative Contentions:

RN1: No enforcement is needed. Governments are signing on and will hold each other accountable.

RN2: BRIC countries will be influenced by the example of the US

RN3: The proposed tax will be proportional to the amount of CO2 so the financial incentives will be environmentally sound.

An Alternative Affirmative Response

The Affirmative presents a case based on the US as the agent of action. The Negative presents a case that is entirely focused on the international community. None of the Negative contentions clash with the Affirmative case. The way I would demonstrate that is to note that even if you believe all of the Negative contentions are true, the Affirmative

contentions could still all be true. The most efficient way the Second Affirmative can answer the Negative contentions would be to say something like:

I would like to respond to the Negative contentions by explaining how they do not affect the Affirmative case. While I am not saying that the Affirmative agrees with any of the Negative contentions, let us consider the implications of assuming they are true.

First, it doesn't matter if there is no international agency that can enforce carbon limits. The resolution and the Affirmative case has the US reduce its carbon emissions, and the US legal system is perfectly capable of enforcing such laws. Second, even if no developing nation will agree to carbon limits, that does not mean that the US, the world's second largest producer of CO₂, should not limit its own emissions. The Affirmative has shown that US action will be economically, environmentally and diplomatically beneficial, with no reference to the action of other countries. Third, even if there are some local harms to developed economies, as the Negative asserts, the Affirmative has shown there will be significant net benefits to the US, and that is why you should adopt the resolution.

This alternative Affirmative⁴ response shows that the Negative has failed to understand and respond to the Affirmative case. It is as if the two teams were debating two different resolutions. A judge can agree with the entire Negative case and still agree with the Affirmative and adopt the resolution. This forces the Negative to use the Second Negative Constructive to explain why the First Negative Constructive is relevant to the debate, in a sense forcing the Second Negative to repeat the First Negative rather than attack the Affirmative directly.

Second, this alternative Affirmative response is very short. The Second Affirmative can use the remaining time to present additional supporting arguments in favor of the Affirmative contentions. (And you should always have additional supporting arguments for all of your contentions!) Alternatively, the Affirmative could spend time pre-empting possible Negative responses. Those options are considered below.

Third, by presenting the arguments as hypotheticals—“*While I am not saying that the Affirmative agrees with any of the Negative contentions, let us consider the implications of assuming they are true*”—the Affirmative leaves open the option of directly refuting the Negative contentions if they choose. But the Affirmative is serving notice to the judge that even if the Affirmative is not able to disprove the Negative contentions and the Negative wins these arguments, the Negative still should not win the debate. This is in line with Kathryn Kernoff's advice about making “even if” arguments in her critique above.

What the Affirmative Did Say

Let's contrast the alternative Affirmative approach to what the Affirmative actually did say in this round. In the responses NR1, NR2 and NR3 the Affirmative implicitly

⁴ While this example is from the Affirmative perspective, the Negative can play the same game. Consider A3. One can agree that it more effective to respond now rather than later to global warming, and still not be in favor of the resolution. Without additional explanation, A3 does not support adoption of the resolution.

assumes that each of the Negative contentions is a valid argument against the Affirmative case: international enforcement is needed; developing countries are required for success; developed economies will be harmed. The replies can't be understood any other way. The arguments were not prefaced by any remarks relating them to the Affirmative case.

When your opponent presents an argument that is not relevant to your case and you answer it without pointing out that it is not relevant, you dignify the argument and give it weight. Many judges will assume that you believe the argument is important and hold it against you if lose it. Did the Affirmative in this round ever state explicitly that the Negative contentions were relevant to the Affirmative case? No, they did not. But once they were pulled on to the Negative ground by attacking the Negative contentions directly, most of the subsequent discussion remained on Negative ground. Nothing the Second Affirmative said made any sense unless you assumed they agreed the Negative arguments were valid.

A Better Negative Attack

While the Negative contentions were not relevant as presented, that does not mean they could be made relevant. The Negative is missing a key argument:⁵

N: Only global action on carbon emissions can be effective against global warming.*

If the Negative can carry this contention, then international enforcement, rejection by developing countries and local economic harm all become issues the Affirmative must confront. By replying to the original Negative contentions rather than explaining how they are not relevant to the Affirmative case or the resolution, the Affirmative team is essentially making this argument for the Negative and conceding it to them. Rather than being way ahead, the Affirmative have dug themselves into a hole.

Pre-Emptying Arguments: A Strategic and Tactical Decision

There is another question you might ask. Suppose the Affirmative follows the strategy I suggest and the Second Negative presents the key supporting argument, N*, in the Second Negative Constructive. The only remaining speeches are rebuttals, and since there are no new arguments permitted in rebuttal, doesn't the Affirmative risk losing the debate? In other words, isn't it better to anticipate and pre-empt N* rather than risk not being able to respond to it at all?

First, the "rule" that no new arguments are permitted in rebuttal is regularly misunderstood and misquoted. Equally important is the "rule" that both teams have a right of reply to any argument. If the Negative introduces new arguments in the Second Negative Constructive the First Affirmative can certainly introduce new arguments in the First Negative Rebuttal to counter them. Otherwise every Negative team would spend the First Negative Constructive replying to the Affirmative case and present the entire Negative case in the Second Negative Constructive. Unless the Second Affirmative has

⁵ Interestingly, Kathryn Kernoff's critique notes the Affirmative team in the final round made a key mistake when it conceded this same point in that debate.

pre-empted every possible Negative argument—highly unlikely—the Negative would always win because the Affirmative would not be permitted to reply.

An argument in rebuttal is only “new” in the sense of being unfair in two cases. It is new if it is truly new, unrelated to arguments presented earlier in the debate. For example, you can’t present a fifth contention or a counterplan in rebuttal. If the Negative presented N* in rebuttal, it would not be valid.

An argument is also new in rebuttal if it is not presented at the first opportunity. You lose the right of reply if you wait too long and so give your opponent no opportunity to reply. If the Negative presented N* in the Second Negative Constructive, the Affirmative must reply in the First Affirmative Rebuttal. If the Affirmative waits until the Second Affirmative Rebuttal to answer N* then the Affirmative is denying the Negative any opportunity to reply, and that is essentially unfair.

Second, pre-empting arguments is both a strategic and tactical decision. Presenting arguments against an argument your opponents have not made—and might never make—is like providing them with a blueprint to defeat your case. Strategically are you better off explaining the argument and how you would defeat it to your opponents and the judge, or are you better off letting your opponents figure it out for themselves and save your counter arguments until they do?

Don’t assume your opponents will know how to fix their case. They did present it incorrectly to begin with. A Second Affirmative Constructive that demonstrates that all or part of the Negative case is not relevant is difficult to overcome. It likely will leave the Negative shaken and unsure how to respond. They will have to introduce new lines of argument late in the debate. It’s much harder to fix a badly presented argument than to defend a well presented one. An opponent who misses a key link the first time around is not likely to get it right the second time either. Don’t do them any favors by providing the link yourself!

Tactically, the question is “what is the best use of your time?” Pre-emption takes time and discloses information. If you pre-empt an argument, your opponent knows what the argument is and how you intend to counter it. But they have to spend time both making the argument and responding to your counter-arguments to carry the point. If you spend the time providing more support to your own case, your opponents have to respond to your new on-case points as well as figuring out and presenting the argument they missed. If they do make the missing argument, you still have your counter-arguments in reserve. You may even be able to present some of those counter-arguments as supporting points to your own case so that they are “on the table” ready to be re-directed when and if your opponents present their missing link. Whatever you do, time is passing and you are getting down to the rebuttals.

Finally, isn’t the point of debate to learn to listen to our opponents and respond to what they say? Isn’t the Affirmative purposely misunderstanding what the Negative was trying to say if the Affirmative follows the strategy presented here?

The point of debate is to listen to your opponents and respond to what they actually say. Don’t automatically respond directly to every argument your opponents present. Ask yourself if the argument is relevant and complete. If it is not on point or has logical flaws,

explain that to the judge first. And remember you may not have to respond to the details of the argument at all.

The actions of the Affirmative in this round indicate that they did not listen and respond to what the Negative actually said. I don't know what the Negative may have intended to say, but I do know that what they did say was missing a key link and because of that it was not relevant to the Affirmative case. You may choose to complete your friends' sentences, but you are not required to complete your opponents' arguments.

Coaching at the Tournament

Debate is an odd sort of competition. Not only do coaches not get to coach their students during a round, they generally don't even get to see their students compete. We rely on the good will of other coaches and variously trained volunteers to judge our teams and provide feedback useful to improving their performance. We try to train the judges and to provide them with guidelines, but we are silent on the role of coaches.

I believe that coaches should choose the level of activity that they are comfortable with during the tournament. Before I got involved in running the tournaments, I used to work actively with my team during the preparation period, and discuss their debates with them between rounds and especially during lunch. I've tried a number of approaches over the years, and found that some things work better than others.

What Doesn't Work

Coaches really cannot feed arguments to their debaters. I have nothing against the practice, I just don't believe that it works. The good debaters won't listen. They know what they are about and they want to develop and run their own case. The other debaters won't really understand the arguments because they don't own them. Debates turn on the clear understanding of what you want to say and saying it properly during the debate. This is surprisingly hard to convey that to another person in a short period of time.

When I debated some of the easiest teams to beat were the ones we described as being "plastic sheeted." Their coaches helped them write all their arguments, which they typed up and then placed the pages in plastic page protectors.⁶ Generally the sophistication of these arguments exceeded the debaters' understanding of them. They would be vulnerable to an original attack because they didn't know how to adapt.

Coach as Facilitator

It is educationally valuable to teach your team (in the sense of all the debaters from one school) to work together to pool their knowledge to solve a problem. It is a skill they will use all their lives. In the pieces I've written on how to manage time during the preparation period, the time allocated to developing contentions and supporting arguments can be done in a "brainstorming" format where the entire team works together and contributes ideas.⁷

⁶ In national policy debate, there was one resolution used all year long. Teams were expected to research the issues.

⁷ See *A Coach's Notes*, November 2008, "Sixty Minutes."

While it would be ideal if one of the experienced debaters could take the role of facilitator—and for many teams they will—for most teams most of the time it is probably better for a coach or teacher to do it, especially for the younger students. I think a trained educator is more likely to make sure they don't get lost or ignored. This is a skill that can be learned and passed on. We had a parent/volunteer/judge who attended every tournament for three years and watched me run the team through brainstorming sessions during prep time. When I went off to run tab, she took over my role for a year and was very good at it.

I will agree that when you facilitate you tend to nudge things in the direction of the arguments that you would use, and you help clarify thinking on various points. But the discovery is primarily done by the students. If they don't get the point, you can't force it on them. If they do get the point, they generally structure it in ways that they are comfortable with.

After brainstorming, the students can use you as a sounding board, presenting their contentions and arguments for your opinion and suggestions, which they may or may not take. During this time I find that I work mostly with the Novices. The Varsity want to be left alone to work with their partners and polish their cases. The Novices need someone to talk to while they figure things out.

Between Rounds

Between rounds I will continue to act as a facilitator. If my team (or any team for that matter) has a question about what happened in a debate I will try to help them answer it. Most of the time I do so with questions: "What did they say?" "What did you say?" "What could you have said better?" and so forth. The purpose of the exercise is to get them thinking, and to understand that you can't discuss a debate unless you remember what was said. Good notes help.

In this process I will usually provide some substance in terms of analysis and counter argument. This is similar to the oral critique I try to give after judging a round, which is generally oriented more towards argumentation than presentation. We—coaches and judges—are there to provide feedback. If a debater can describe what happened in a round, I don't think it's unreasonable to discuss it with them during the tournament while it is fresh in their minds.

There are two things I will not discuss. I will not say anything that would indicate who won or lost a round, as required by CDA rules. I also will not talk to anyone about a debate they did not participate in, with the exception that I will talk to coaches about the performance of their own debaters if I judged them and if they ask. But I won't talk to the coach about the performance of the other team in the round.

I believe these are reasonable restrictions on a coach's activity. It provides debaters (and their coaches) with feedback on their own performance. It also avoids "scouting," the

practice of reporting on other teams to your own debaters. I believe that most coaches would agree that scouting is bad form.⁸

Does Coaching Help?

Based on what I've seen over the past twelve years or so in CDA, the level of coach involvement during the tournament doesn't make a lot of difference. Teams with more interventionist coaches do not seem to win more trophies. The best debaters each year are usually very talented students who have come up through the league and are fiercely independent about the arguments they run. A coach can help to raise the average performance a little by working with their team during prep time, but I don't believe that help can bring a team to 3-0 or to win a trophy.

I do believe that the "coach as facilitator" does help educate debaters over the long term, but that is different from coaches helping to win individual tournaments. Given how little we see our teams during the tournament, this interaction is a valuable part of the debate experience.

The CDA Handbook is silent on this issue. My preference—based on my observations just described—is to keep it that way. If a coach believes the debaters should be on their own, then that is what he should do. If a coach believes he should be available as an advisor and sounding board, then that is what he should do. If a coach believes he should actively help to write cases for his team, then that is what he should do, though, as I've said, I don't believe this works very well. The only way we will find out what works best is if we let people try different things and see what happens. Good techniques will spread quickly and bad techniques will die quietly.

⁸ Scouting is the practice of sending observers to other debates for the purpose of reporting on the arguments used. It is not considered scouting for debaters to talk among themselves about the debates they participated in.