

A Coach’s Notes¹

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THBT the US government should buy equity stakes in private companies.

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Introduction

This edition relates to the December 6, 2025, CDA tournament and topic. Previous year’s editions can be found through the Training Materials page on the CDA web site.

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. 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. If you would like to reply to my

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

Start with a Good Text

If you are going to read a debate textbook—and every serious debater should read at least one—my favorite is Simon Quinn’s *Debating in the World Schools Style: A Guide*. It is available for free download as a pdf file. The [CDA Training Material](#) page has instructions on how to find it.

Reading it you have to ignore some of the World Schools specific debate format information. World Schools is a form of parliamentary debate that originated in Australia and New Zealand and is becoming more popular in the United States now that the NSDA has adopted it. Rather than our 2-on-2 it is 3-on-3 debate, and a team can have up to 5 members, the two additional helping during case prep.

But set aside the format. The book is a treasure of practical information on how to analyze a motion, build a case during a limit prep period, construct arguments, manage case prep, present, reply, question. And while every debate text discusses these—there are two more referenced on the CDA website—this one feels more real. As someone who debated at a high level in high school, reading Quinn my mind keeps saying, “Yes, exactly!” His advice is clear and you can apply it immediately.

Big, Red Ball Motions

In chapter one, Quinn considers motions of the form, “This House believes that the object is a big, red ball.” The point of this example is that the motion sets multiple burdens for Gov. To win, Gov must show the object is big, is red, and is a ball. Opp can win the debate by concentrating on any subset of the three, winning if it can show the object isn’t big, or the object isn’t red, or the object isn’t a ball. So far so simple.

Quinn goes on to consider a more realistic example one might face in a debate tournament, “This House believes that we should limit population growth by legislation.”² Here Gov has two burdens, show we should limit population growth, and further that we should do it by legislation. Opp has multiple paths to victory by arguing against either one or both.

Hidden Burdens

That December’s motion is a “big, red ball” motion is not immediately obvious. One burden is clear. Gov must support the mechanism of the US government buying equity stakes in private companies. But there is a second, implicit burden on Gov. Why should the US government invest in private companies at all? Opp has three ways to win:

² If you think this motion unrealistic, see, “Why Switzerland is weighing a 10 million population limit,” *Bloomberg News*, December 10, 2025

- Show the US government should not invest in private companies at all, equity or otherwise;
- Agree the US government should invest, but show the US government should not make equity investments;
- Show both that the US government should not invest, and even if you agree it should, should not make equity investments.

The teams in the final round at Daniel Hand were not entirely clear on these two issues. Gov primarily argued the first, that the US government should invest in private companies. Opp replied with a little bit of each, that the US government should not invest as it was against free market principles, and that investment would fail or lead to corruption, and eventually suggested that if support was needed, loans, subsidies, and other methods would be better. I do not know how the other judges decided the round, but this lack of clarity on Opp may have been part of it.

Linkage

Quinn gives another example, “This House believes that London deserved to be awarded the 2012 Olympics.³” The two burdens are whether London deserves to be awarded the Olympics, and whether 2012 is a good date. Quinn’s point is that the first is more important: an Opp team that concedes that London should host, but that 2012 is too soon, has given up too much and is in a weak position.

Notice the linkage between the burdens. For “big, red ball” the issues are all separate: there a small red balls, and big green balls, and big red cubes. No descriptor has any necessary relation to the others.

For this month’s motion, and the London Olympics example, the conditions are linked. 2012 doesn’t matter if London is not an acceptable host; purchasing stock doesn’t matter if the US government has no business supporting businesses. One issue clearly has priority.

Relation to the Stock Issues Case

I’ve written about the stock issues case a number of times.⁴ It is “the” correct way to analyze a policy motion, even if debater no longer present a full stock issues case as was required in my day.

A stock issues case consists of:

- a significant harm or need justifying action;
- a reason why the status quo inherently cannot remedy the harm or supply the need;
- a plan, essentially an elaboration of the motion, to provide a solution;

³ The book is copyright 2009 so the example was relevant when it was written.

⁴ See Coaches Notes for December 2024, February 2017.

- an explanation of why the plan solves by remedying the harm or supplying the need;
- additional advantages that may arise from adopting the motion/plan not directly related to solving the harm.

Today’s debaters are more likely to talk about uniqueness (similar to inherency), solvency, and advantages, but it’s useful to know the old framework for two reasons. First, if Gov hasn’t considered the first four of these issues in their case, then there is a weakness for Opp to attack. If there is no problem, there is no need to do anything. If the status quo can solve the problem, there is no need to do anything. If there is no plan, nothing gets done. If the plan doesn’t solve, again, why bother.

For this month’s motion, the first issue, whether the US government should aid private companies, is part need, part solvency, part disadvantage. It could be private companies don’t need any investment, or that government investment won’t work, or that government investment may cause harm (as Opp argued in the final at Daniel Hand by violating free market principles).

Looking at the motion, or the final round, from a stock issues perspective lets you see the linkages and the priority among the issues.

Arguing “Even if”

When the burdens are not linked, your arguments against them will be similarly independent. You can safely concede the object is red, if you prefer to argue only that it is not big and not a ball.

When the burdens are linked, you have to be careful about replying. In the final round at Daniel Hand, the MO, after arguing that government intervention is bad, casually says something like, “besides, if companies need help, the government would be better providing loans or research funds rather than buying stock.” This sounds as if Opp is agreeing that companies need government support, which Gov could have used to say Opp was conceding a large part of the Gov case.

In Quinn’s London example, in order to argue that London just needs more time to prepare, it would seem you have to concede London should host the Olympics. In order to argue that there are better ways to support firms than stock purchases, it would seem you have to concede companies need government support. Yet it seems reasonable Opp should be able to argue against both legs of the Gov case.

The proper way to do this is to make an “even if” argument. For the London Olympics:

“We have just explained why London is not an appropriate host for the Olympics. However, even if you don’t accept this argument, we have several reasons why 2012 would not be a good date for London to host.”

Similarly for this month’s motion:

“We have shown you that the US government should not be involved in funding companies, by stock purchases or any other means. However, even if you don’t accept this argument, we have several reasons why stock purchases would be the worst way to provide support.”

You want to make it very clear to the judge that you are not conceding the first burden. Instead, you are making a two-pronged argument: we don’t agree with A, but we also want you to consider the hypothetical, that if A were to hold, then B is still a bad idea.

Isn’t that what Opp said in the Hand final? Maybe, maybe not. Maybe it’s what they intended to say. What matters is what the judge hears. Whenever there is a danger that what you say could be interpreted in different ways—especially if one of those interpretations works against you—you want to be very careful to be precise about what you actually say. In this case, it’s worth taking an extra few seconds so the judge understands you are making an “even if” argument and not conceding anything to your opponents.

Why not always argue “even if”? First, you may feel your arguments against one leg are much stronger than those against the other. It’s a sound tactical choice to spend all your time presenting those arguments rather than weak arguments against the other leg. (On the other hand, briefly tossing out those weak arguments may serve as “time wasters” forcing the MG to spend some time, or even to misjudge and spend too much time, answering them.)

Second, Gov may present a stronger case supporting one leg or even ignore the second leg entirely. By focusing all your fire on the weak or unsupported leg you essentially dismiss the Prime Minister’s constructive speech and force the MG to start over.

Be careful though. A clever Government team could lure you in with a focus on one leg in the PMC but have the MG ready to present the second, depending on what they hear from the LO. This would leave the MO with a greater burden, and allow the PM to present new arguments in rebuttal to any new arguments in the MO.

Relation to Counterplans

In the final round at Hand, as noted above, Opp mentions several alternatives to stock purchases: tax incentives, grants, direct subsidies. There are many more: loans, loan guarantees, research funding, performance bonuses, accelerated regulatory approval, the list goes on. Any of these, or any combination, might have been proposed as a counterplan, though Opp never does so.

Offering a counterplan requires Opp to concede the need for action. In terms of the two linked issues in the motion, Opp needs to concede that government should support industry. In the framework of the stock issues case, Opp is conceding the need/harm, and that inherently the status quo cannot solve. The debate then becomes a contest between the motion/plan supported by Gov and the counterplan proposed by Opp: which does a better job of meeting the need/harm with the fewest disadvantages or the most additional disadvantage.

A counterplan is very different from an “even if” argument in this situation. The counterplan concedes Gov its burden of showing need/harm; in this situation the “even if” argument does not. It also requires Opp to show the counterplan is superior to the Gov plan under the motion, not simply that the Gov plan is bad. When a counterplan is offered, even if the Gov plan is worse than the status quo, if the Gov plan is better than the counterplan Gov should win.

Like the “even if” argument, Opp should be very careful to make sure the judge understands their strategy. If offering a counterplan, it should be the first thing the LO discusses after definitions. The LO should clearly state Opp is proposing a counterplan. The LO should clearly explain the details of that counterplan. And the LO should very carefully explain to the judge that they accept the need for action, and the debate is now about whether the motion/plan or the counterplan is the best course of action.

Complexity and confusion never help you in a debate. Opp teams will often vacillate between contesting the need, contesting the Gov solution, and offering alternatives. If your strategy isn’t clear, you leave it up to the judge to decide what you are trying to say. Not a good choice.

Designing a Motion

When I set a motion, I try to think carefully about what I want the debate to be about. For December’s motion, there are two issues: what role should the government play in the private sector; whether the government should buy stock in private companies as the specific implementation of that role. While the press is full of stories about stock purchases due to recent US government actions (as reflected in the packet) it is the less interesting of the two questions question.

It is widely agreed that the government has a role in managing the economy at the macro level, using monetary and fiscal policy to maintain employment and inflation at desired levels. The question of whether and how much the government should meddle at the level of individual companies is much less settled. Often called “industrial policy”, the two competing policy poles usually cited are the US, with, until recently, less direct intervention, and China, with a more statist approach.

An alternative version of the motion might be something like: *This House believes that government should strongly support private companies.* The usual policy prescription might be: *THBT the US should implement an industrial policy.* On a comparative basis: *THBT China’s statism is superior to the US laissez faire economic policy* or vice versa. While a Gov team might propose a plan including stock purchases, Gov is not tied to a specific mechanism. This makes industrial policy the focus of the debate.

Which debate would you rather have?

Final Round RFD from Daniel Hand

The final round at Daniel Hand was between Fitch High School on Government and Loomis Chaffee School on Opposition. The panel voted 2-1 in favor of Government. I was the vote for Opposition. Here is my RFD with some minor editing.

I voted for Opp on two issues. First, mechanism. Gov never really explains how they achieve their impacts, or rather, they wave a magic wand insisting the SEC and voters will make sure the gov't will choose the best companies, avoid creating monopolies, avoid favoritism, avoid corruption, etc. Gov simply assumes these will work, without explaining why. Opp gives me greed, which is a clear mechanism why companies will lobby for these funds and insiders will try to profit from how they are assigned. In the MOC Opp notes if you only invest in the best companies, you are likely to establish monopolies. Opp also notes Gov never explains how the gov't will be able to choose the "best" companies, and notes the major example, Intel, is in lagging due to its own poor decisions.

Second, Gov never deals with Opp's "moral" argument, that these investments are counter to the free market and democratic principles that the US was built on. Opp could have done a better job explaining the impact of this shift, but they say enough to give it importance and to show it bolsters the mechanism argument above. While I also consider it secondary to the economic arguments, Gov never answers it at all.

I did not give credence to Gov's bipartisanship argument. Just because left and right agree on one policy does not mean they will cooperate on anything else. As Opp notes, the Gov argument here is just quotes. I also felt Opp's "there are other ways for government to boost companies" argument was not developed enough to count. This motion is easily counterplanned, but Opp never proposes a counterplan, never shows how these alternatives would be effective, superior to, or avoid the flaws they assign to the Gov plan. Also, as Gov notes, loans, subsidies, etc., are not mutually exclusive with stock purchases.

Both teams' time management in the later constructives could be improved. The LO spends almost seven minutes presenting the Opp case and provides minimal reply to the Gov case. The MG spends all their time on the Opp case and ignores the LO's few replies to the Gov case. The MO starts with the first Gov contentions but then shifts to a laundry list of issues not clearly related to the contentions. Structure and balance are important.

Otherwise a good round on a difficult subject.