

The Final Round¹

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Connecticut Debate Association

Daniel Hand High School

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Resolved: Internet sites should be required to remove fake news.

A Note about the Notes

I've reproduced my flow chart for the Final Round at Daniel Hand High School augmented by what I remember from the debate. The notes are limited by how quickly I could write and how well I heard what was said. I'm sure the debaters will read them and exclaim, "That's not what I said!" I apologize for any errors, but I hope debaters will appreciate this insight: what a judge hears may not be what they said or what they wish they had said.

There are two versions of the notes. The one below is chronological, reproducing each speech in the order in which the arguments were made. It shows how the debate actually occurred. The second is formatted to look more like my written flow chart, with each contention running across the page as the teams argued back and forth. It's close to the way I actually take notes during the debate.

The Final Round

The Final Round was between the Hamden team of Akashi Agarwal and Kayla Johnson on the Affirmative and the Warde team of Max Lee and Cameron Luther on the Negative. The debate was won by the Negative.

1) First Affirmative Constructive

- a) Introduction
- b) Statement of the Resolution
- c) Definitions
 - i) "Internet Sites(IS)": social media (SM) platforms
 - ii) "Fake News(FN)": false information published with the intent to deceive
- d) Plan
 - i) Sites can ask to be verified and get a blue check
 - ii) Public can flag a site as false and be sent to a committee for review
 - iii) A site that gets too many flags can get permanently flagged as false or shut down
- e) A1²: Fake news leads to domestic and international tension
 - i) FN is often considered real news

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² "A1" indicates the Affirmative first contention, "N2" the Negative second contention and so forth.

- ii) E.g., false report about Israel taken as fact by Pakistan who threatened nuclear war
- iii) E.g., Hilary Clinton child-abuse report led to pizza restaurant shooting
- iv) E.g. Donald Trump can say anything and be believed
- f) A2: The resolution provides a disincentive to FN
 - i) FN is created to make money, e.g., click bait
 - ii) Take it off Facebook, no ads, no money
 - iii) The more FN people read the less likely to believe the truth
 - iv) E.g., the last election
 - v) Discourage reading
- g) A3: FN saturates the media on major issues
 - i) FN outperformed real news on Facebook the last week of the election
 - ii) Zuckerberg says it had no influence on the outcome, but how do we know?
 - iii) Majority now check SM as the primary news source
- 2) Cross-Ex of First Affirmative**
 - a) What is your plan? SM companies have a committee to review claims. Sites can apply to be reviewed and get labeled. Users can flag FN for review.
 - b) Did you define “required”? No need. We can assume laws passed. SM sites and Mark Zuckerberg have said they can do this.
 - c) Doesn’t “required” mean “hold accountable”? We can’t specify the exact fine or prison sentence.
 - d) How can you ensure FN removed if no gov’t enforcement? It’s in SM’s best interest as FN drives away customers
 - e) SM companies will set up committees? Yes
 - f) How are they funded? SM platforms already want to do it.
- 3) First Negative Constructive**
 - a) Intro
 - b) Resolution
 - c) We believe the plan can be accomplished by the status quo
 - d) N1: Plan is an undue burden on internet sites
 - i) Facebook, Twitter, etc., are not the source of FN but get the burden
 - ii) This isn’t fair. It’s like penalizing newsstands for newspapers
 - iii) Algorithms and committees are expensive
 - iv) Facebook has been working on the problem for a while
 - v) The right way is to burden the FN producers, not the hosts
 - e) N2: Status quo will achieve the goal
 - i) Facebook is already using algorithms rather than editorial committees
 - (1) Bad press causes them to lose money
 - (2) They will solve the problem eventually
 - ii) Plan has no requirement
 - (1) Committees and bans happen now
 - (2) Aff has no penalty, no regulation, no oversight
 - (3) Plan doesn’t implement resolution
 - f) Plan will be ineffective
 - i) It’s an undue burden on SM providers
 - ii) Better to go after the content creators

- iii) We are not proposing a counterplan, only that the plan is not adequate
 - iv) “required” is the crux of the debate. Aff has no gov’t involvement.
- 4) Cross-Ex of First Negative**
- a) Does all FN come from domestic sources? No, Macedonia is one example.
 - b) How can you punish them? No counterplan, but plan doesn’t solve this problem either.
 - c) Can FN go viral without SM? Under N2 they are already solving the problem.
 - d) SM isn’t the only source of FN? Yes, but no need to put additional burdens on SM.
 - e) Are algorithms better than algorithms and an editorial committee? Algorithms are better.
 - f) Can’t algorithms make errors, be biased? People too. Algorithms better.
 - g) Why are committees high cost? Committees have a lot of work, pay, research, checking. Better to let SM choose the method.
- 5) Second Affirmative Constructive**
- a) Intro
 - b) There is a misunderstanding.
 - i) Just because punishments weren’t specified doesn’t mean there won’t be any
 - ii) We don’t need to be specific, but there will be a gov’t requirement
 - c) N1: Why burden Facebook?
 - i) May not be able to reach producer, as Neg admitted in CX
 - ii) Under CX Neg agreed need SM for FN to go viral
 - iii) We need SM to act, and they are responsible
 - d) N2: SM are not taking the steps in the Aff plan
 - i) Algorithms don’t do critical thinking
 - (1) E.g., religion is not backed by scientific fact
 - ii) Committees wouldn’t be controlled by corporations
 - iii) People have the power to flag FN
 - e) A1: Another Pakistan/Israel situation could be a disaster
 - i) E.g., a claim Donald Trump will blow something up will be believed
 - f) A2: no money, no FN
 - i) Committees have no political agenda to push
 - g) A3: The last election is an example of how FN pushes out real news
- 6) Cross-Ex of Second Affirmative**
- a) Who determines what is FN? We have verified sites, public flagging and a review committee
 - b) So they could be biased and suppress news? If everything goes wrong, but it’s not likely
 - c) Are the committees controlled by the company? Yes
 - d) Appointed by the company? Not sure how Facebook does it
 - e) Aren’t companies acting out of self-interest? They will be required to act by the gov’t.
 - f) What is “required”? That they remove FN
 - g) What forces them to do this? We don’t have to specify a punishment. Why do we obey any law?

- h) Will the committee be punished if it doesn't work? No. We don't get rid of a bad school, we fix it.
- i) Doesn't FN threaten Facebook profit? It harms Facebook's profit by making the experience unpleasant.

7) Second Negative Constructive

- a) Intro
- b) I'll cover Aff then Neg
- c) We concede A1 and A3: FN is bad and we agree
- d) A2: plan provides no real disincentive
 - i) There is no accountability
 - ii) The "gov't requirement" was introduced late and that's unfair
 - (1) No requirement means no committees
 - iii) Committees are inherently biased to preferred news
 - (1) Algorithms are unbiased
 - iv) According to NPR, Facebook and Google have algorithms that are 99.9% accurate
 - v) School analogy in CX is false: gov't doesn't fund SM
 - (1) SM providers are rich so Aff has no incentive
- e) N1: US is biggest source of FN
 - i) Plan is a burden on SM providers
- f) N2: the market's invisible hand, the profit motive, will get SM providers to act
 - i) It's happening now. We don't need the resolution
- g) N3: editorial boards are not efficient
 - i) It would be better to pass laws sanctioning FN companies
 - (1) This isn't in Aff plan
 - ii) In CX we asked Aff who decides
 - (1) No clear definition
 - (2) Donald Trump says the New York Times is FN: would Aff shut down the NYT?
 - iii) The plan violates the social contract and give gov't too much control

8) Cross-Ex of Second Negative

- a) Is Google's machine learning better than Facebook's? I don't work at Google
- b) Are they similar? I'm not at Google
- c) To algorithms make mistakes? NPR quotes a study that says 99.9% accurate on FN
- d) If FN is hard to define how can an algorithm decide? Didn't we agree on a definition
- e) How can you expect the Aff to write a specific plan? If we can't evaluate Google vs Facebook, we can't be sure gov't action will be effective
- f) Who designs the algorithm? Everyone could use Google's algorithm
- g) The algorithm decides FN versus not fake? Yes
- h) How was it tested? I don't know
- i) The algorithm tests all content? All
- j) So the art club at Hamden High is checked? If it's fake, yes.

9) First Negative Rebuttal

- a) Intro

- b) Plan
 - i) No one is enforcing it; no answer in CX; they've changed their case
 - ii) We still win on inherency
 - (1) In CX Aff agreed FN threatened Facebook profits by upsetting users
 - (2) Loss of profit most effective form of regulation
 - iii) Facebook rejected editorial boards: swamped and too costly
- c) N1: SM would be burdened
 - i) Gov't supervision costly
 - ii) SM can solve problem on their own
 - iii) Algorithms the best way to go
- d) A1: problem can be solved by status quo
- e) Plan means a gov't agency has to check for accuracy
- f) Neg doesn't need gov't because profit incentives SM to fix problem themselves

10) First Affirmative Rebuttal

- a) Intro
- b) Plan
 - i) Knew resolution said "required", knew it had to be Federal gov't
 - ii) We are not required to define penalties
 - iii) We are not the legislature, just as Neg isn't Google
- c) Fake news is bad
 - i) Clearly defined: not factual, intent to deceive
- d) Neg says an algorithm can remove FN
 - i) Facebook process personal information
 - ii) Google processes different information
 - (1) Google self-driving car crashed due to algorithm
 - iii) Can't compare Facebook and Google without more information
 - (1) E.g., Hamden HS
 - iv) Algorithms must cover all situations
- e) Neg want us to regulate international sources
 - i) Aff only has to verify the article and the source
- f) Boards corrupt? We believe they will be moral

11) Second Negative Rebuttal

- a) Intro
- b) Which side has better moral imperative?
- c) Which side has better implications?
- d) Editorial boards
 - i) Not really "required"
 - ii) No specifics on how they would be judged effective
 - iii) Laws, fines, review process? Aff has no real requirement
- e) Both sides agree FN is not good
 - i) A2/Plan are the crux of the debate
 - ii) Neg has shown plan not effective
- f) N1: plan is undue burden
 - i) Why prevent new SM providers?
 - ii) How do we know plan will apply to them?
 - iii) SM are not regulators

- g) Gov't power over morals
 - i) Violates the social contract
 - ii) Can't let gov't decide what is true and what is false

12) Second Affirmative Rebuttal

- a) Intro
- b) Sad to go back and forth on definitions
 - i) We are not experts in crime and punishment
 - ii) There will be a punishment, but we can't set a \$ amount
- c) Donald Trump and the NYT
 - i) We aren't letting the gov't regulate truth
 - ii) Committee reviews sites and news flagged by public
- d) Economic feasibility not explained
 - i) Plan services purpose of removing FN from SM
 - ii) Don't understand Neg argument that this is not feasible
- e) A1: not touched by Neg
- f) A2: misunderstood by Neg
 - i) Plan provides disincentive to post FN by removing profit
 - ii) No profit, why do it? For fun?
- g) A3: also not touched by Neg
- h) N1: Gov't should be involved vs gov't should punish originators of FN
- i) N2: Contradicts punishment argument
 - i) Resolution compels corporations to solve problem