

A Coach's Notes¹

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Connecticut Debate Association

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THBT the reopening of federal land and water for oil and gas drilling will do more harm than good.

Introduction

This edition relates to the October 8, 2022, CDA tournament and topic. 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 AITE 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. 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 comments or sound off on some aspect of the debate topic or the CDA, I look forward to your email.

AITE Tournament

This was our first in-person tournament in 2 ½ years. Special thanks to AITE and Claude Morest for hosting. It was also the first in-person CDA tournament to use electronic ballots. The Judges and Debaters not only kept us on time, but we finished 40 minutes early!

The tournament was also our first in parliamentary format with four preliminary rounds and a final. Everyone seemed to adapt well. The final round was a great exhibition of the style, with all four debaters easily using the extra time in constructive speeches compared to our previous format, and both teams offering and all speakers taking points of information—which replaced cross-examination—during the speeches.

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Reason for Decision—RFD

Below you will find my RFD for the final round at AITE. Before that a brief comment on what an RFD should be, and why they should be public.

What Is an RFD?

Debaters are presented with a motion and must develop a case for or against. A judge's reason for decision is a case for or against the motion, "THBT the Gov/Aff/Prop side won the round." Everything we tell debaters should apply to writing and evaluating an RFD. It should be persuasive. It should be based clearly on statements the judge heard the debaters make in the round. (Note "statements the judge heard" not "statements the debaters made": the two may be different.) It is an argument, and not everyone may agree with it. But the debaters should be able to understand from the RFD why the judge decided as they did, and what they might have done differently to improve or change the result.

Public RFDs

No one sees preliminary rounds or the judge's comments in them other than the debaters in that round. We are all off debating or judging elsewhere.

Elimination rounds are generally open to spectators. I try to stay and flow the elims if I can. As a debater, I watched other debaters to learn how to be a better debate. At many tournaments, the judges will announce and give brief (or not so brief) comments when the round is over. As a judge, I watch other judges to learn how to be a better judge. I also try to watch online round recordings, when available. Unfortunately, round recordings usually do not include the judges' oral critique, which is often the most interesting part.

Debate is about persuasion. I know what I find persuasive. I want to know what others find persuasive. As an experienced judge, it's a way of benchmarking and improving my decisions. Judging debate is subjective, but that doesn't mean, as a community, we don't have generally agreed upon the standards. If all we see are our own decisions, it's hard for those standards to develop, and easy to drift off into community of one.

My RFD at AITE

The final round at AITE was between Ridgefield on Gov and Stamford on Opp. You can find my flow of the round in separate files on this website. I voted for Stamford on Opp, as did the other two judges. This is revised, expanded, and corrected from the comments I wrote on the ballot.

My decision is based on two arguments that were almost incidental to both teams' cases. First, the Inflation Reduction Act leads to a net reduction in CO2 because the green parts outweigh the drilling parts. Gov only responds tangentially by quibbling over the statistics. Second, Opp argues that without the compromise on drilling, the green stuff in the IRA would never have passed. Gov tries to say that since the motion is "more harm than good" Gov needn't concern itself with passage. But if drilling brings net more green in this way, then it's a valid Opp advantage, and an argument against Gov solvency. Opp presents these as their third contention and includes it as part of the LOR summary of the

round. Together, these are good reasons not to reverse the drilling provisions in the IRA, which is Gov's interpretation of the motion.

The motion is "more harm than good". That requires a comparative: a list of harms; a list of goods; a weighing of the two. More importantly, debaters must show that the harms and the benefits are the result of the side of the motion they are attributed to. Listing harms and benefits is easy. Showing solvency, that the motion does or does not cause the harms and benefits, is hard.

Gov's case is that drilling is bad because of the impact on climate and land use, and, defensively, that oil could be replaced by renewables. These may be true but are not compelling in the context of the motion. Climate change may require drastic action; energy demand may be met by renewables; the land may already be used efficiently. The first is a harm, the other two are statements of fact. None of these are specific to the drilling under the IRA, Gov's interpretation of the motion. Gov doesn't show that rolling back this drilling is "drastic" action; that energy demand will be met by renewables if this drilling is stopped; or that this drilling will reduce the efficiency of the land use. (There is a POI and reply that seems to indicate the point about destroying Native American sites is false, and Gov never goes back to it.)

Opp's first two contentions are similar: drilling will reduce inflation and support American values. Like the Gov contentions on climate, land use, and renewables, these Opp contentions are more about inflation and American values, than they are about showing how reversing the IRA drilling provisions will affect them. As with Gov, I agree there is a general connection: less drilling means that this particular oil won't generate CO₂; more oil should put downward pressure on oil prices. But there is no analysis that shows that this drilling is significant enough to have those impacts, or that countervailing actions won't dilute them.

Each side has an argument that is distinct from those listed above. As noted, Opp's third contention argues that the drilling provisions of the IRA enabled including the provisions for green energy that are needed to deal with climate change. Compromise is necessary for Congress to act. Together, the two provision lead to a net reduction in CO₂. There is a mechanism that connects the specific issue in the debate—as defined by Gov—to a clear net benefit.

Gov has an argument I would have found similarly effective, but it is buried as a subpoint in their first contention on climate change: cancelling drilling would set an example for other countries and lead to better compliance with their Kyoto/Paris promises. This also provides a specific link from the IRA to a net benefit. But it is initially only a subpoint, and not mentioned again until it is touched on in the PMR.

Gov and Opp both leave a lot of the decision in my hands. Opp never points out Gov's lack of offense, though the MOC does a good job covering both sides of the flow. The MGC spends most of its time on Gov's first contention, barely touching the Opp case and dropping the third contention entirely. The LOR does a good job of summarizing the compromise/net reduction argument, and I find that convincing.

Given the contentions presented, there are arguments I'm surprised I don't hear. Gov tells me drilling is bad and we have to cancel projects. Opp never tells me we'll just

import and burn the same amount of oil from elsewhere so no net CO2 improvement. (Actually, Gov, in the PMR, seems to say the drilling won't replace imports. I think this is an own goal!) Opp tells me drilling will lower gas prices. Gov never tells me the best way to encourage people to go green is for prices to go up and stay up, in which case we don't need the IRA green incentives!

Finding the Right Issue

Debaters often lock on to the most obvious issue without thinking them through. Here Gov locks on to climate change, pollution and renewables. Opp locks on to inflation, foreign policy.

It's not clear how much oil will be produced as a result of the IRA and associated changes. The one number in the packet is 1.1 billion barrels over its lifetime.² Over 20 years that is about 150,000 barrels per day (do the math). The same article with the 1.1 billion number says the Gulf alone produces 2.6 million per day, and US production is 11.7 million barrels per day (check your almanac, a permitted source!). So at best, after however much time it will take to develop the new leases, we are talking about 1% of US oil production, and a much, much lower share of world oil production.

Let's face it: this isn't going to move the needle much on climate change, pollution, inflation or foreign policy. And Gov doesn't have the fiat to implement the use of renewables. On these contentions, both sides claim benefits that are easily minimized. Neither side has any real solvency.

I am not saying these arguments are incorrect, but that they are not significant. The new leases will probably contribute to climate change and pollution, put some downward pressure on prices and help US foreign policy, and there will be more use of renewables to the extent we don't burn more oil. But the linkage between the leases and these effects are weak and the impacts are small. There is no convincing solvency; there is no significance.

As noted above, both sides have a less obvious, but much stronger arguments. Gov, as a subpoint to the first contention, states cancelling drilling is needed to show commitment to climate change goals and encourage other nations to do the same. Opp, as their third contention, says the leases are a regrettable but necessary quid pro quo to implement transition to renewable energy.

This gives us a real debate. This issue is climate change. Gov says the best way to combat it is set an example that, in itself, may not immediately solve the problem, but by showing commitment and encouraging action by others will ultimately win out. Opp says that's all very nice, but you have a lot of people who aren't convinced, and to get them to support renewables, you have to give them something in return: practicality over ideals. Both of these arguments tie solvency to the specifics of the motion.

Talking about problems is easy. Showing solvency is hard. When choosing your arguments, make solvency and significance top criteria.

² Packet, page 2, from "Where the New Climate Law Means More Drilling, Not Less," from the New York Times, September 14, 2022.