2019-2020 PROPOSED DEBATE RESOLUTIONS

National Christian Forensics and Communications Association
Resolved:
The United States Federal Government should substantially reform its policies regarding immigration.

Background

“Two-out-of-three voters still think illegal immigration is a serious issue, but nearly half of voters think the government isn’t working hard enough to stop it,” according to RasmussenReports.com, January 2019. The US federal government recently suffered the longest shutdown in history over an immigration policy showdown. With a global rise in populism, immigration debates are raging in countries across the world, and the United States is no exception.

The New York Times reported on March 5, 2019, “in February more than double the numbers of migrants crossed the border without authorization compared to the same period last year, approaching the largest numbers seen in any February in the last 12 years.” The Department of Homeland Security estimates that there were approximately 12 million illegal immigrants living in the US as of January 2015 (3.7% of the US population and the most recent numbers available through DHS); nearly 80% of those unauthorized immigrants have resided in the US for more than 10 years.

A Center for Migration Studies report estimates that 44% of illegal immigrants entered the country legally but overstay their visas.

Why is immigration such a contentious issue? Why is there such a distinct line between the positions of the left and the right? What should the goal of US immigration policy be? While the role of government certainly includes maintaining secure borders and sovereignty, what constitutes effective immigration policy? The underlying values to examine through this topic include security, federalism and states’ rights, isolationism and internationalism, economics, humanitarianism, justice and fairness.

Immigration issues pervade many federal agencies including the Departments of State, Homeland Security, Justice, Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services. The US Department of State issues immigrant and nonimmigrant visas. There are approximately 4 million people on the waiting list to receive immigrant visas. The Department of Homeland Security houses the USCIS, Border Patrol, ICE, OIS and USVISIT. USCIS (US Citizenship and Immigration Services) handles lawful entry such as family members and employees, e-Verify, background checks, naturalization interviews and ceremonies, foreign adoptions, refugees and asylum. ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) investigates, detains, and removes those who are in the US unlawfully.

The Department of Justice holds the immigration courts through the Executive Office for Immigration Review.
**Weaknesses**

One drawback of a topic this timely is the changing landscape can make an affirmative plan moot during a competitive season. Like any complex issue that spans multiple disciplines, there would be a great deal to learn.

**Affirmative Topics**

Affirmative topics regarding immigration include the border wall, border security, birthright citizenship, dual citizenship, the travel ban and Muslim immigration, sanctuary cities, detention, deportation, catch-and-release, temporary laborers, amnesty, healthcare and education for immigrants, H1B visas and skilled labor, overstaying visas, crimes committed by immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

**Negative Topics**

Negative teams, like today’s lawmakers, will argue harm to our economy, harm to US workers, threats to our national security, that the outcomes are not guaranteed, are too costly, or cause intended consequences that are not worth it. Is comprehensive or piecemeal reform preferable in order to mitigate damage and measure consequences?

**Sources**


Resolved:
The United States Federal Government should substantially reform the Food and Drug Administration.

Background

Although government oversight over the safety and production of chemicals and foods extends as far back as 1848, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was created in 1930 to streamline the oversight process and protect the safety of agricultural and chemical products. Unfortunately, the modern incarnation of the FDA has become bloated and heavily critiqued. Currently, the FDA is responsible for foods (excluding poultry), drugs, biologics, medical devices, radiation emitting devices, cosmetics, veterinary products, and tobacco products; however, a wide range of government overlap restricts the FDA’s influence and effectiveness. For example, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is primarily responsible for the drug abuse, which puts the criminalization of drugs squarely outside of the FDA’s mandate. The Federal Trade Commission regulates fraudulent advertising for food and drugs. The Federal Alcohol Administration regulates the interstate and foreign commerce of some alcoholic beverages.

The Department of Agriculture regulates several major foods such as poultry, pesticide use, much of the treatment and housing of livestock.

The wording of the resolution largely prohibits reforms that would force the FDA to approve of specific devices, drugs, or other innovations. It also prohibits tampering with the criminalization of drugs. Government policy regarding the FDA concerns its mission and scope of regulatory authority. Federal laws may govern the legality of certain products such as heroin or cocaine, but usurping the FDA’s regulatory responsibility for individual innovation would be an overstep of congressional power.

The scope of the resolution is significantly less broad than previous resolutions such as China or international terrorism. Additionally, significant evidence exists to suggest that underlying causes of FDA issues include staffing requirements, advisory requirements, and other personnel regulations. Debaters should have an opportunity to fix those underlying issues through the resolution or will risk generic solvency issues across most affirmative reforms.

If the general consensus is further limitations, there are several regulatory areas of the FDA that seemed primed for reform, including: drugs, medical devices, personnel management, and advisory board requirements. The resolution can simply list pertinent areas with an and/or qualifier at the end to achieve a more restrictive approach to the topic.
**Strengths**

While the FDA is a more limited topic, reforms can be directed at multiple aspects of this flawed but functioning agency including process, ethics, cost, governmental overlap, and questionable mandates.

**Weaknesses**

Superficial reforms will face generic solvency issues. Competitors will have to dig deeper to identify the actual causes of FDA inefficiency and ineffectiveness in order to present a solid case.

**Affirmative Cases**

Affirmative topics could include the process of testing and approving innovative drugs, devices, and vaccines, the ethical boundaries around voluntary testing of potentially dangerous drugs, the explosive costs of health care coupled with the ever-expanding insurance requirements, the scope of the FDA’s responsibilities, the governmental overlap between the FDA and other agencies, quality control in light of increasing wages or hiring requirements, and the possibility of shifting from a federally mandated requirement to a voluntary step of certification that shifts risk to the customer while ensuring legal penalties for false labeling.

**Negative Topics**

Negative teams can address the dangers of an unregulated market which risks public safety and decreases transparency. In response to proposed regulations, negative teams can point to the large number of regulations that have already doomed the FDA to inefficiency and have limited the availability of life-saving drugs and devices. Negatives can also draw on market responses and economic principles to address changes to a flawed but functioning FDA.

**Sources**


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Resolved:
The United States Federal Government should substantially reform its energy policy.

Background

Energy-related innovation and regulation have been core components of American history that balance domestic and foreign policy. Usable energy is the lifeblood of developed nations, causing them to compete for reliable sources of exploitable energy to feed innovation and infrastructure. Created in 1977, the Department of Energy oversees the security and innovation of energy resources such as coal, oil, solar, wind, water, and nuclear. Security oversight includes nuclear de-proliferation and the safe disposal of cold-war era nuclear devices. Energy source oversight includes innovation, stability, renewability, and environmental protections. At the Department of Energy’s disposal is a budget that was narrowly north of 30 billion in FY2017 and narrowly shy of 30 billion in FY2018.

Although the Department of Energy is the primary regulator of America’s energy policy, many other agencies contribute as well. For example, the EPA is primarily responsible for most environmental conservation efforts that impact the collection of coal or oil resources. The Department of Defense provides security assistance and oversight for many aspects of the US nuclear program. The Department of State predominantly handles US relationships with energy exporters or foreign nuclear powers.

The scope of federal energy regulation has dipped significantly in previous years. Under President Trump’s administration, methane emissions, the Paris Climate Accords, and the Clean Power Plan have all waned, and regulatory oversight has increasingly returned to the state level. As states re-embrace regulatory roles, questions have emerged about other areas where the Federal government may wish to re-engage regulations or reduce them even further.

Energy infrastructure is in desperate need of updates and maintenance. Several key projects (including the Keystone Pipeline) remained stalled as lawsuits and litigation rages. US regulations of offshore drilling seek to balance environmental protections and the efficiency needed to continue pushing the US to energy independence.

Meanwhile, energy’s interplay with national security cannot be overstated. Every US president since Nixon has heavily advocated for energy independence from OPEC or other energy suppliers, in an effort to break ties with regimes that could potentially damage the reputation or threaten the economic stability of the United States.
Strengths
This dynamic resolution features a broad range of policies and past domestic regulatory reforms. Competitors will explore the complex relationships between sustainable energy sources, energy independence, national security, and economic impacts. By understanding the importance of energy, the costs of harvesting that energy, and the implications of substituting alternative sources, competitors will be able to debunk many myths regarding energy policy.

Weaknesses
The broad nature of energy policy may prove challenging to novice debaters who focus too narrowly or become overwhelmed with the plethora of cases justified by the resolution. Competitors may become overly focused on environmental issues and overuse the global warming debate. In addition, many Affirmative cases will have limited arguments to refute them.

Affirmative Topics
Affirmative topics could include fracking, safe nuclear opportunities, oil exportation, climate change, environmental sustainability, renewable energy innovation and regulation, the security of domestic energy sources, and international engagement regarding energy trade and regulation.

Negative Topics
Negative teams can address environmental impacts, long-term sustainability, economic impacts, diplomacy with the international community, government waste, topicality, and solvency for reforms.

Sources
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Resolved: Individuals have a right to health care.

Overview
Health care is a major concern in today's world. As politicians debate the best way to ensure access to quality health care, a more fundamental question remains unanswered: do individuals have a right to health care? This question of value must be answered in order to make sense of the health care debate.

Framing the Topic
The concept of rights is a key starting point for seminal philosophical thought while also playing a critical role in the everyday decisions of policymakers. This resolution provides an opportunity for debaters to engage with the core questions on the essence of rights. What makes something a right? What is the delineation between natural rights and legal rights? Are the boundaries of rights determined more by potential encroachment on individuals or on larger societal units?

In order to adequately address the question of whether all individuals have a right to health care, an overarching framework for what constitutes a right must be established. Three primary disciplines provide a starting point for research: moral philosophy, political philosophy, and ethics.

Personalism vs. Liberalism (Moral)
While liberalism supports decisions that benefit an individual unless they also harm the majority or society, personalism values decisions that benefit individuals unless they harm individuals. Early pioneers include Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, Murice Nedoncelle, and John Crosby. Motivated by their respective faiths, these thinkers held the value of human dignity to be of utmost importance. Originally known as a philosopher named Karol Jozef Wojtyla, Pope John Paul II built on the work of the aforementioned philosophers, developing a practical set of personalist doctrines and relating them to health care by echoing the official stance of the World Medical Association, “in which highest respect for human life and primacy of good of the human over interests of science and society were declared directly.”

Positive vs. Negative Rights (Political)
According to Aeon Skoble, Professor of Philosophy, “Positive rights require others to provide you with either a good of service. A negative right, on the other hand only requires others to abstain from interfering with your actions.” By this definition, basic and almost uncontestable rights like life, liberty, and property are negative rights. If there is a right to health care, it is very closely tied to the right to life. It would be a positive right, therefore making it more difficult to defend as a human right, but it is also a positive right tied inexplicably to the right to life.

Ethics
Competitors must research whether utilitarianism supports a right to health care. Although a capitalist economist, philosopher John Stuart Mill attributes health care as part of the government's role in a capitalist society.
Written in 1948 and ratified by the United Nations, the WHO constitution explains that healthcare is a basic human right that is due to everyone.7 On the contrary, the utilitarian perspective can also be used to prove that public healthcare cannot be supported in such a way as to actually be helpful. If it cannot be of general benefit to society, then it should not be considered a right under the utilitarian framework.

**Weaknesses**

The popular term, health care, broadens the scope of the debate to include a wide variety of assistance that could be classified as “care,” thus potentially muddling what this supposed right to health ought to entail. For example, would an affirmative debater have to support a right to have a positive socioeconomic background?8

**Strengths**

With many facing limited access and rising costs, health care is a significant issue. This resolution encourages students to contemplate the underlying values and the physical, cultural, societal, economic, educational, and legislative factors that impact the health status of any person, thus providing a wide array of opportunities for meaningful clash.

Because the resolution does not limit the level of health care, competitors will be forced to consider whether or not the right exists rather than the extent of care. Debaters must develop a reasonable framework to view relevant and practical questions surrounding health care in our nation even as they wrestle with the philosophical importance of rights in general.

Finally, this resolution provides an excellent opportunity to see Lincoln-Douglas Value debate as a simple yet deep clash of ideas that is relevant but not excessively concrete.

**Sources**


5 Bradley, Andrew. “Positive Rights, Negative Rights, and Health Care.” *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 36, 8 Oct 2010, pp. 838-841. [https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e9f0/7f42276679a3ca88a1409e79e185a65746.pdf](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e9f0/7f42276679a3ca88a1409e79e185a65746.pdf)


Resolved: 
Preventive military strikes are ethical.

Overview

Questions about war and what types of warfare are ethical are always relevant in a world that will continue to be at war until God establishes the new heavens and the new earth. In the meantime, Christians would do well to consider under what conditions war is justified. This resolution focuses debaters on one aspect of just warfare: the ethics of preventive military strikes.

Framing the Topic

Before examining the ethics of just war, debaters must examine the differences between preemptive war and preventive war. Preemptive war is a war in which a country declares war on or attacks another country when war is inevitable or imminent. The most obvious example of this is Israel attacking Egypt during the Six-Day War. During this war, it was abundantly clear that Egypt was going to attack Israel imminently, so Israel took the initiative to cripple Egypt and its allies. This form of war is often accepted as justifiable by ethicists.

Determining what constitutes a preventive war is debatable, but the general understanding involves war that is likely but not necessarily imminent. The 2003 Iraq War serves as an example of preventive war. While it turned out that the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) scare was largely exaggerated, the general goal of the war was to stop Saddam Hussein from acquiring WMDs so that he could not ultimately threaten other countries.

Many in the US would favor a preventive strike against North Korea or Iran to halt their nuclear programs

Once debaters have solidified their understanding of the key terms, they should research ethical frameworks.

Consequentialism vs. Deontology

The two main schools of ethics thought are consequentialism and deontology. Consequentialism believes that actions are just because of their consequences, while deontology believes actions are just because of duties that individuals have. The line between these schools can blur, but a consequentialist might argue that preventive strikes are necessary because they will stop more damage in the long term. Deontologists may respond by saying that preventive strikes are unjust since the targeted country shouldn’t be punished for something it has not yet done. This debate may come down to whether or not the ends justify the means.

While many people assume that the ends never justify the means, this issue is hotly contested among ethicists. Consider the assassinations of dictators.

Realists vs. Cosmopolitans

Debaters should consider international ethics frameworks. Mark R. Amstutz addresses international ethics in his book International Ethics: Concepts, Theories, and Cases in Global Politics, and Anne-Marie Slaughter addresses international relations in her article “International Relations, Principal Theories.”

When defined correctly, Realists generally believe that countries should focus on protecting themselves while Cosmopolitans generally believe that countries should care about all citizens regardless of their country of origin.
Is War Justifiable? Debaters should consider what justifies war in the first place. Is self-defense the only justification? Do legitimate humanitarian justifications exist? Michael Walzer addresses these issues in his well-known book Just and Unjust Wars.

**Weaknesses**

Because preventive war can be defined in multiple ways, debates could potentially devolve into a clash of definitions. Definitions are critical, but the debate should focus on ethics. Debaters should quickly clarify their definitions and move onto the main part of the debate. More importantly, because ethics is a complex issue, debaters are encouraged to avoid oversimplification of the issues. This would not only damage the depth of debate, but might also cause them to debate the same arguments over and over.

**Strengths**

This is a fruitful, well-balanced LD debate topic. But more importantly, as ethics deals with what is morally right and wrong, this is a critical topic for NCFCA debaters as it will provide them with the tools to better engage the world with Christian values and morals within the framework of ethics.

**Sources**

Resolved:
Deliberative democracy is ineffective.

Overview

The great American experiment in democracy and freedom continues to this day, and now nearly six in ten countries are democratic to some extent according to the Pew Foundation.¹

As modern representative democracies have matured, political theorists have continued to ask questions about the best way to approach rule by the people and their representatives. Citing problems with the modern democratic process many political theorists have called for reasoned deliberation among citizens and their representatives as a necessary precondition to decision making. These theorists call their new version of citizen rule “deliberative democracy.”

Framing the Topic

As debaters consider if deliberative democracy is effective, they must answer the question, “Effective at what?” What values are democratic processes seeking to achieve and does deliberative democracy effectively achieve those values? While deliberative democracy is a popular idea amongst political theorists, not everyone believes deliberation will benefit society.

Fundamental Critiques

Some critics do not share the values of deliberative democrats.

• Trustee Model vs. Delegate Model of Representation

What is the nature of representation? Are representatives supposed to be delegates, elected to enact the exact will of the people, or are representatives trustees who are free to govern as they see best on behalf of the people? Deliberative democrats gravitate toward the delegate model of representation, with the belief that political decisions are legitimate insofar as they reflect the direct will of the people.

• Goal-oriented vs. Process-oriented

Deliberative democrats focus on the process of decision making rather than the outcomes because the process is what makes the decision either legitimate or illegitimate in their view. Critics would say that a constitutional republic is already a legitimate form of government, and therefore the goal of politics is to make decisions that lead to just, wise, and beneficial outcomes.

• Republicanism vs. Direct Democracy

The Founding Fathers believed that governments derive “their just powers from the consent of the governed” but realized that direct democracy was not a workable model on a large scale. They also realized that rule by the majority can easily trample on the rights of the minority.

For these and other reasons, the Founders created a republican government enshrined in our Constitution rather than a direct democracy. Yet deliberative democrats advocate for ways to implement elements of direct democracy on a large scale while still respecting the rights of minority groups.
Practical critiques

Some critics share the values of the deliberative democrats, but do not believe that deliberative democracy achieves those values.

- **Empowerment / Equality**
  Some theorists question whether deliberative democracy would actually empower minority groups to be part of the political process. Dr. Lynn M. Sanders from the University of Virginia wrote, “Even if democratic theorists notice the inequities associated with class and race and gender, some people’s ideas may still count more than others...Prejudice and privilege do not emerge in deliberative settings as bad reasons, and they are not countered by good arguments. They are too sneaky, invisible, and pernicious for that reasonable process.”

- **Consensus & the Limits of Rationalism**
  Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe critiques deliberative democrats for overestimating the rationalism of the electorate and underestimating the role of passions in decision making. She argues that conflict between opposing views will always exist and a fully inclusive rational consensus can never be reached. Thus, a model of democracy needs to include antagonism and conflict as necessary elements that must be channeled toward democratic ends.

- **Democratic Participation**
  In her book *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus Participatory Democracy*, Dr. Diana C. Mutz from the University of Pennsylvania shares the results of her research showing essentially that the more people deliberate, the less they actually participate in the democratic process. Therefore, if the goal is participation, deliberative democracy may not be the best model for encouraging citizens to engage in political activism.

Strengths

This topic encourages students to consider the fundamental value and limits of democracy as a political theory. Students will benefit from studying the history and application of democracy since they are the ones on whom the future of liberty depends. This resolution allows for multiple different justifications on both the affirmative and the negative which is likely to keep debates fresh and interesting throughout the debate season.

Weaknesses

Because of the wealth of literature on this topic, the research burden may be significant. The use of the term “effective” may imply that the resolution can only be evaluated from a teleological perspective (e.g. the philosophy that ideas must be judged by their results rather than by their conformity to a moral code or by the virtuous character they produce).

Sources


