

SYNOPSIS OF THE PROBLEM AREAS FOR 2012-2013

PROBLEM AREA I: CIVIL RIGHTS

Resolved: The United States federal government should amend Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, substantially increasing its protections against race and/or gender discrimination.

Despite Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream nearly fifty years ago of making equality a reality, civil liberties for minority groups is still a daily struggle. Fifty years ago, Congress responded to King's demands for civil rights with the passage of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*. Specifically, Title VII was written to combat discrimination in the workplace in areas of hiring, firing, promotion and harassment. Although Title VII has curbed some race and gender discrimination, the law has not evolved fast enough to respond to the new forms of discrimination that are occurring. Race and gender discrimination is still pervasive in the workplace and leaves many Americans suffering with inequality. An affirmative certainly has a range of plans in regard to expanding coverage to discriminated groups by having Congress clarify existing statutes or expanding the law to incorporate more individuals. An affirmative plan could argue for an amendment that eliminates current loopholes that have allowed the courts to interpret Title VII too narrowly in areas of race, such as with post 09-11 discrimination or new channels of electronic communication. Affirmatives can also address gender discrimination, including pregnancy discrimination, equal pay, sexual harassment and sexual orientation. Negative ground is equally robust. Negative case debate can focus on the effectiveness of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or on whether Congressional legislation has the ability to provide effective regulations. Negative case debate can also focus on whether the workplace environment is the correct avenue in which to address civil liberties. Generic counterplan ground would include a federal/states debate, a Congress/Courts debate, and a regulation/voluntary compliance debate. This area is also unique in the critique ground it provides through identity politics.

PROBLEM AREA II: INFRASTRUCTURE

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its transportation infrastructure investment in the United States

Over the last ten years, there have been a series of significant transportation infrastructure failures indicating the nation's once world-class infrastructure is falling apart and other nation's are pulling ahead of the United States. Transportation infrastructure policy featured prominently in President Obama's 2011 State of the Union address and is likely to be a main component of his re-election campaign. This topic offers debaters a rare opportunity to consider how government and policy affect the physical structures of daily life; at the same time as the public at-large considers these investments. The national policy debate topic has only discussed transportation policy once, in 1939-40, and the national topic has never considered "infrastructure."

Proponents of increasing investment in transportation infrastructure argue there is a substantial need to invest in transportation infrastructure and that infrastructure is central to a modern economy, the United States' leadership position in the world, the security of our nation and a high quality of life. Opponents argue that government spending in this area is unnecessary and further complicates fiscal policy. Examples of affirmative cases include direct investment in high-speed rail, highways, bridges, airports and seaports. Other affirmatives might propose new federal structures to finance transportation infrastructure projects. Negative positions could focus on the economic consequences of additional spending, the effectiveness of various transportation solutions, the political implications of infrastructure investment and critiques of economic development.

PROBLEM AREA III: IMMIGRATION

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its legal protection of economic migrants in the United States.

Immigration reform offers a rare example of federal policy where the key questions do not involve spending money. Instead, the debate will focus on matters of social justice and fairness. The United Nations defines the term "economic migrant" as a "person who does not meet definitional requirements of the term 'refugee' but who voluntarily leaves his or her native country under exclusive influence of economic considerations to establish residence elsewhere." Legal protection is often defined as extending citizenship, extending voting rights, improving conditions of employment and limiting abuses in detention or deportation procedures. Defenders of immigration reform argue that America is a nation of immigrants, and that a progressive immigration policy will strengthen the economy. Opponents believe that immigrants take jobs from Americans and threaten public safety. Examples of possible affirmative cases include: comprehensive immigration reform involving amnesty for immigrants already living in the United States, reversing restrictive state laws such as those in Arizona and Georgia, treating economic refugees from Haiti the same as those from Cuba, passing the DREAM Act, providing health care for immigrant families, providing a more generous provision of work permits for immigrants with special skills in medicine or engineering, providing legal representation for detainees, providing food stamps for impoverished immigrant families, among others. Negative positions could focus on the economic and employment harms of increased immigration, increased risk of a terrorist attack, federalism positions and the political implications of immigration reform.

PROBLEM AREA IV: ENTITLEMENT REFORM

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially limit the growth of its Medicare and/or Social Security spending.

Government debt is rapidly increasing. The primary cause is the structural growth of entitlement spending. Social Security and Medicare, which for decades have produced surpluses that were directed into trust funds, soon will start to produce deficits. Insufficient funds were placed in trust, and those trust funds were used to finance government discretionary spending. The retirement of the “Baby Boomers” will break both systems and push government debt beyond stable limits. Within fifty years, all government revenue from taxes will be needed to cover entitlement benefits and the interest on the debt owed to their trust funds. The United States will be forced to cut all non-entitlement spending or increase taxes. Affirmative teams will argue that we have time to avoid catastrophe if we begin to act now, while negatives will argue that predictions of collapse are exaggerated and politically motivated. Affirmative teams would have a wide range of options for plan mechanisms. Reducing benefits, reducing who gets benefits, reducing administrative costs or limiting medical procedures that benefits will cover are all areas for different cases, with multiple different plan mechanisms in each area. Other affirmative teams will opt for privatization schemes or may choose to phase out entitlement spending entirely. Affirmative advantage areas will focus on the long-term financial stability of the federal government, with the attendant economic and national security implications. Affirmative teams can also claim advantages related to health and poverty from preventing system collapse. Kritik affirmatives can focus on the ethical concerns about mandatory government programs and taxation. The negative will be assured of ground related to restricting spending or benefits. This carries with it economic and retirement security impacts. Negative teams will have substantial opportunity to address the system collapse through a powerful set of topic-specific counterplans, from employment promotion to restructuring to increasing tax revenue, as well as other forms of entitlement reform that compete within the literature. There is substantial controversy in the literature over the fiscal health of Medicare and Social Security, allowing the negative to attack the case harms and solvency in depth. The political backlash disadvantage will be the most important issue on the topic, as Medicare and Social Security spending will be key issues in the 2012 campaign. Negative teams will be able to run kritiks of neo-liberalism, paternalism, ageism and the rhetoric of poverty.

PROBLEM AREA V: HIGHER EDUCATION

Resolved: The United States federal government should establish an education policy substantially increasing its support for postsecondary education in the United States.

Postsecondary education is increasingly viewed as the engine of our economy and the tool to address issues of social and economic mobility. The U.S. is beginning to lag significantly behind other nations in the proportion of students earning a degree, and the

longer-term impact of this decline creates a question regarding the United States' continued economic competitiveness and growth. This topic will allow teams to debate the federal role in higher education and whether support for postsecondary education would be better left to the states and/or private organizations. Teams will be able to discuss which is the best path to increase the U.S. postsecondary education system's ability to educate individuals and create a skilled workforce for the future. An additional benefit of this topic is that debaters will be able to explore the breadth of postsecondary education: public institutions, private institutions, for-profit institutions, two-year vs. four-year institutions, technical institutions, graduate and professional education and online education. Possible affirmative areas include: educational quality, financial aid, scholarships, remedial education, increased support for STEM initiatives, access and completion (especially for minority, disadvantaged and rural students) and increased use of technology to enable access for all students to access postsecondary education. Negative arguments include: states, private actors, federalism, funding and case debates over the proposed affirmative plan mechanisms. Additionally, students can argue the political consequences of expanding the federal role in postsecondary education and if federal involvement in postsecondary education will decrease the strength and independence of the U.S. postsecondary education system.