



Making a World of Difference

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

 @UILCIANDE

2024 • INVITATIONAL B

Jan. 10, 2024



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UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

INVITATIONAL B • 2024

- 1. This trial is the first monopoly case of the modern internet era — the last, against Microsoft, went to trial in 1998. Against what company did the U.S. government begin a major antitrust case in September?**
 - a. Microsoft
 - b. Meta
 - c. Apple
 - d. Google
- 2. Burdened by a large debt, declining sales and lawsuits claiming company representatives filled thousands of illegal prescriptions for painkillers, what pharmacy chain filed for bankruptcy in October?**
 - a. CVS Pharmacy
 - b. Walgreens
 - c. Rite Aid
 - d. Health Mart
- 3. In a 4-to-3 decision that set off a political and legal earthquake, the Colorado Supreme Court said Donald Trump was barred from holding federal office because he engaged in insurrection. This would prevent him from holding public office based on what law?**
 - a. Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution
 - b. the 14th Amendment to the Constitution
 - c. *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 558 U.S. 310 (2010)
 - d. the oath to support the Constitution of the United States
- 4. “Why would I allow people at 1 or 2% and 0% to be hitting me with questions all night?” former U.S. President Donald Trump said in an interview with Fox News host Bret Baier. Trump confirmed in mid-August that he would NOT be doing what?**
 - a. turning himself in to the Fulton County, Georgia, jail to be formally charged
 - b. running for a second term as president
 - c. returning more classified documents found in his New York apartment
 - d. attending the first Republican presidential primary debate
- 5. India became the first country to land a spacecraft on what part of the moon?**
 - a. Sea of Tranquility
 - b. South Pole
 - c. Sea of Showers
 - d. the dark side
- 6. Which of these drugs is NOT among the first 10 drugs selected for price negotiations by the Biden administration under the Inflation Reduction Act?**
 - a. Jardiance, used to treat diabetes and heart failure
 - b. Xarelto, used to prevent strokes and blood clots
 - c. Stelara, used to treat Crohn’s disease
 - d. Metformin, an oral medication used to treat diabetes

7. **A Republican-controlled Texas State Board of Education rejected seven of 12 proposed science textbooks for eighth graders. Because of a newly overhauled science curriculum, the textbooks are now required to include information on what?**
 - a. evolution
 - b. climate change and fossil fuel usage
 - c. Bible-based models of sex
 - d. race and racism

8. **Until Hurricane Idalia, what area of Florida had not been struck by a hurricane in more than a century?**
 - a. the Atlantic Ocean side
 - b. the Big Bend region
 - c. the Florida peninsula
 - d. the Florida panhandle

9. **Although he eventually lacked enough support to get the position and withdrew his name from contention, a divided group of Republicans nominated Steve Scalise for what position?**
 - a. vice president
 - b. president pro tempore
 - c. speaker of the House
 - d. majority leader

10. **It was the largest health care strike in the U.S. In early October, some employees with what company walked out?**
 - a. Kaiser Permanente
 - b. Blue Cross Blue Shield
 - c. Abbott Laboratories
 - d. Baylor Scott & White Health

11. **Meta shut down thousands of accounts and pages that were part of the largest covert, cross-platform influence operation Meta has ever disrupted. While a similar type of attack was called Doppelganger, what was that operation in August backed by Chinese law enforcement called?**
 - a. spiders, bots or DDoS attacks
 - b. phishing
 - c. spamouflage
 - d. bait and switch

12. **The first “small-format, beverage-led concept” opened in Bolingbrook, Illinois, in December serving up coffee, frappes and quick bites. What company is trying out this concept?**
 - a. McDonald’s with CosMc’s
 - b. Burger King with King Coffee
 - c. Wendy’s with Dave and Joe
 - d. Sonic with Drive-thru Joe

13. **Production of “Oklahoma!” was stopped in Sherman, Texas, until the school board voted unanimously to continue. Why was the production stopped?**
 - a. Male and female roles were reversed in the production.
 - b. The production went significantly over budget after hiring semi-professional cast members.
 - c. A transgender student was cast in the lead role.
 - d. Students boycotted the production in solidarity with actors on strike in California.

14. **After nearly all employees at the artificial intelligence company threatened to quit and to join ousted chief executive Sam Altman, the future of what company was thrown into chaos?**
 - a. OpenAI
 - b. Microsoft
 - c. FTX
 - d. The Boring Company

15. **In a bipartisan effort, members of the U.S. House said George Santos “is not fit to serve.” Santos admitted to lying about his background and has been indicted on federal fraud charges. What was the ultimate outcome of the action taken by the House of Representatives?**
 - a. Santos easily survived the effort to expel him.
 - b. Santos was removed from office.
 - c. In a narrow, party line vote, Santos was expelled, but he has committed to run for election next fall.
 - d. Santos was barred from serving in any federal elected office for life.

16. **A groundbreaking treatment was found to be safe enough for clinical use, setting the stage for likely federal approval of a powerful potential cure for an illness that afflicts more than 100,000 Americans. The treatment, known as exa-cel, was developed by Vertex Pharmaceuticals of Boston and CRISPR Therapeutics of Switzerland. Treatment for what?**
 - a. COVID-19
 - b. sickle cell disease
 - c. AIDS
 - d. breast cancer

17. **The Writers Guild of America reached a tentative deal with major Hollywood Studios. One of the sticking points was the use of artificial intelligence. What did the deal conclude?**
 - a. Scriptwriters may use AI at their own discretion but cannot be directed to do so.
 - b. AI is banned from all work related to writing in Hollywood.
 - c. AI cannot be used for anything but checking grammar or spelling.
 - d. If used, companies must credit AI in onscreen writing credits.

18. **“They are walking, stalking, ruthless killers,” said Tanya Plibersek, Australia’s minister for the environment and water, declaring war on what?**
 - a. Burmese pythons
 - b. feral cats
 - c. northern giant hornets
 - d. wild boars

19. **In early December, visitors to the Smithsonian National Zoo said their farewells to what animals that have been at the zoo for nearly 23 years?**
 - a. giant pandas
 - b. spotless giraffes
 - c. western lowland gorillas
 - d. African elephants

20. **In *Held v. Montana*, a group of young people in Montana won a landmark lawsuit when a judge ruled that the state’s failure to consider what when approving fossil fuel projects was unconstitutional?**
 - a. destruction of lands occupied by various American Indian tribes
 - b. the increasing cost of housing, which is hitting young people hard
 - c. climate change
 - d. underwater aquifers that provide drinking water

21. It cost the Texas economy \$24 billion. It reduced the states' nominal gross domestic product 1 percentage point. Further, Texas was twice as impacted as the rest of the country by what?
- the decline in available water due to the drought
 - an increase in the number of people not eligible to work in Texas
 - the increase in the inflation rate to 7.7%
 - the record hot summer
22. For generations, it has been a way of life in Texas, the most quintessential of American main courses and a premium protein around the world. It's also the single most damaging food for the planet. It is the largest agricultural source of greenhouse gases worldwide, and it has a bigger carbon footprint than any other type of protein. What?
- pork
 - chicken
 - beef
 - soybeans
23. American soldier Travis King returned to U.S. custody via China, having been expelled from what country?
- South Korea
 - Vietnam
 - Mongolia
 - North Korea
24. The word, meaning style, charm or attractiveness, emerged from internet and gaming culture, according to Oxford, and was popularized in 2022 by the YouTube and Twitch streamer Kai Cenat. What was Oxford's 2023 Word of the Year?
- rizz
 - goblin mode
 - swiftie
 - beige flag
25. The only company of its type still operating in California is Waymo, owned by Alphabet. Another company, Cruise, ceased what operations in Austin, Texas, and Phoenix, Arizona?
- drone delivery
 - ocean cruises
 - autonomous vehicles
 - sales of cryptocurrency in brick-and-mortar stores
26. The Amazon River reached its lowest level ever documented on Oct. 16, suffocating endangered pink dolphins, shutting down a major hydropower plant and isolating tens of thousands living in remote communities who can only travel by boat. Where?
- Paraguay
 - Venezuela
 - Egypt
 - Brazil
27. Which of the following is NOT true of Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana, elected speaker of the House in October?
- He has called homosexuality "inherently unnatural."
 - He has opposed clean energy.
 - He voted to certify the 2020 election.
 - He supports a national abortion ban.

28. In an Oval Office address Oct. 20, 2023, U.S. President Joe Biden asked Congress to secure \$105 billion for all EXCEPT which one of the following?
- the war in Ukraine (\$60 billion)
 - the war in Israel (\$14 billion)
 - the U.S. / Mexico border security (\$14 billion)
 - South Korea / North Korea border security (\$17 billion)
29. Robert Kennedy Jr. has been a sharp critic of political leadership. What decision did he make that pundits said could change the dynamics of the 2024 election?
- He switched parties and would run as a Republican.
 - He would drop out of the race entirely hoping, he said, for a “significant” cabinet position.
 - He would drop out of politics to become president of Harvard University.
 - He would run as an independent candidate.
30. Increased volcanism, an aging sun and the merging of our present-day continents into the equatorial Pangea Ultima, researchers in the journal Nature Geoscience said, will result in the extinction of what in about 250 million years?
- mammals
 - plants
 - coral
 - all life on earth
31. USB-C is a universally accepted standard that enables charging, syncing data, and playing audio and video. iPhone 15 models have a USB-C connector. Why did Apple switch from Lightning to USB-C?
- Customers demanded USB-C given that it is 10x faster than Lightning when transferring files.
 - The European Union required mobile device makers to use the USB-C standard by the end of the year.
 - Apple established the universal standard for all devices now using USB-C for everything from printers to monitors to hard drives to mobile devices.
 - Apple will profit from the change, gaining licensing revenue for every USB-C port/cable used.
32. How did Texas senators vote on 16 charges of impeachment that Attorney General Ken Paxton engaged in corruption and bribery?
- Senators found Paxton guilty and removed him from office.
 - Senators voted to stop the trial.
 - Senators voted to acquit.
 - Senators sent the decision to the courts.
33. Heavy rains caused by Mediterranean storm Daniel caused deadly flooding across eastern Libya. Subsequently, what happened that killed more than 11,000 people?
- two dams burst
 - a magnitude 4.0 earthquake
 - fires spread by high winds and drought
 - Hurricane Lee followed right behind

34. **Ruling that a new map needed to be drawn because Republican lawmakers had failed to comply with orders to create a second majority Black district or something “close to it,” a panel of federal judges in September rejected what state’s latest congressional map?**
- Alabama
 - Georgia
 - Texas
 - North Carolina
35. **The federal Health and Human Services Department advised moving what substance from “Schedule I” — drugs that have “no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse” — to less tightly regulated “Schedule III”?**
- marijuana
 - fentanyl
 - naloxone
 - arsenic
36. **Sam Bankman-Fried, founder of FTX cryptocurrency exchange, was convicted of seven charges of what?**
- election subversion
 - wire fraud, conspiracy and money laundering
 - racketeering
 - sexually abusing and defaming a former employee
37. **An executive order by U.S. President Joe Biden includes requiring testing and assurances that, although they holds “extraordinary potential for both promise and peril,” what cannot be used to produce biological or nuclear weapons?**
- social media outlets
 - satellites in Earth orbit above the U.S.
 - artificial intelligence programs
 - robots
38. **Ed Currie, founder of PuckerButt Pepper Company in South Carolina, holds the record for the hottest chili pepper in the world — the Carolina Reaper. This past fall, he beat his own record with a pepper nearly twice as hot. What was the small, wrinkly yellow-green pepper called?**
- the Scoville
 - Pepper X
 - a Capsaicinoid
 - Trinidad Moruga Scorpion
39. **Rupert Murdoch stepped down and said his oldest son Lachlan will become sole chairman of what corporation?**
- Walt Disney Company
 - Fox Corporation
 - Warner Bros.
 - Newsmax
40. **Sha’Carri Richardson missed the Tokyo Olympics after testing positive for marijuana. However, in August 2023, she earned what title after finishing a 100-meter race in 10.65 seconds?**
- first African woman to earn a world record
 - fastest person to run 100 meters
 - fastest person alive
 - fastest woman in the world

THE ESSAY

NOTE: *Contestants who do not write an essay will be disqualified.* Essay length is not a major grading factor as long as the essay is substantial and demonstrates a sincere effort to discuss the assigned topic. Cover as many corners of the issue as practical, including historical, political, economic, social and cultural, when relevant. Avoid including your personal opinions, as more than enough information on the subject has been published.

A focused, concise and specific essay beats a vague and rambling essay.

PROMPT

The Texas Legislature meets in regular session for no more than 140 days every other year. In 2023, however, the Texas Legislature continued meeting for the trial of the attorney general and in four special sessions by year's end totaling almost as many days as the regular session. Discuss the actions legislators took — or didn't take — during the third and fourth special sessions as well as the trial of the attorney general.

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ANSWER KEY

ESSAY PROMPT

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POTENTIAL DISCUSSION POINTS PREPARED Jan. 10, 2024 might include, but should not be limited to...

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. D | 21. D |
| 2. C | 22. C |
| 3. B | 23. D |
| 4. D | 24. A |
| 5. B | 25. C |
| 6. D | 26. D |
| 7. B | 27. C |
| 8. D | 28. D |
| 9. C | 29. D |
| 10. A | 30. A |
| 11. C | 31. B |
| 12. A | 32. C |
| 13. C | 33. A |
| 14. A | 34. A |
| 15. B | 35. A |
| 16. B | 36. B |
| 17. A | 37. C |
| 18. B | 38. B |
| 19. A | 39. B |
| 20. C | 40. D |

- *Costs* — A full 30-day session amounts to about \$1 million in per diem payments to lawmakers meant to cover their expenses in Austin.
- *First session* — The first special session ended June 27, 2023, with no new laws.
- *Second session* — The second special session ended July 13, 2023.
- *Paxton trial* — After 10 days, the Texas Senate on Sept. 16, 2023, acquitted Attorney General Ken Paxton of 16 articles of impeachment alleging corruption and bribery, his most artful escape in a career spent courting controversy and skirting consequences of scandal. No article received more than 14 of the required 21 votes to convict. Only two of 19 Republican Senators voted in favor of convicting for any article — a stark contrast to the more than 70% of House Republicans who impeached the attorney general in May.
- *Third session* — Texas lawmakers came into the third special session, which started in October, focused on education, primarily around the issues of school vouchers and teacher raises. But other issues came up as well, as Gov. Greg Abbott prioritized border security-related legislation. The third special legislative session ended with a whimper morning without a deal on school vouchers — Abbott's top priority — as well as several border security bills he had asked for. The session produced laws that will bolster GOP dominance in the state's new political maps, restrict transgender student athletes from playing on sports teams that align with their gender identity and dole out federal COVID-19 relief funds to programs across the state. Senate Bill 7, a bill that could ban private employers from having mandates that require someone to have the COVID-19 vaccine as a condition of their employment or position, passed and was signed into law Nov. 10, 2023.
- *History* — Never before has the governor called a fourth special session the same year as the regular session, underscoring the gridlock Abbott has faced this year as he has pushed lawmakers to pass his priorities. Four special sessions are unusual but not unheard of. There were previously 10 times in Texas history where a governor called at least four special sessions after a regular session, the most recent being 2004.
- *Fourth session* — Abbott's agenda for the fourth session included four items: boosting funding for schools, including through the creation of a voucher program; school safety measures; legislation to create criminal offenses for crossing the Texas-Mexico border illegally; and funding for border walls and border security operations, including more police for the Liberty County community of Colony Ridge. Legislators left vouchers, school safety and elections bills unfinished at year's end. The casualties of lack of bipartisan cooperation included Senate Bill 5, which would have spent \$800 million on school safety measures through 2025, and Senate Bill 6, which would have changed the timeline of a trial after an election contest was filed by a citizen or group. Legislators failed to reach explicit agreement on moving forward on big-ticket items like teacher pay raises. School vouchers lost out on an 84-63 bipartisan vote in support of an amendment by state Rep. John Raney (R-College Station), which removed the Educational Savings Account provision from the omnibus legislation. Abbott said that if lawmakers do not pass vouchers during the fourth special session, he will use it as an issue against recalcitrant members of his party in the primary. Legislation to make crossing the Texas-Mexico border illegally a violation of state law did pass and Abbott signed it into law. In fact, Abbott traveled to the Rio Grande Valley to sign three bills that pour more money into his three-year effort to deter illegal immigration at the Texas-Mexico border and give Texas law enforcement authority to arrest undocumented immigrants anywhere in the state.
- *School vouchers* — Educational savings accounts, also known as school vouchers, were not approved in the first four special sessions. Abbott may call the Legislature back for a fifth session in 2024. Abbott, who had threatened lawmakers with more special sessions to pass the proposal, seems to have turned his attention to punishing voucher opponents in this fall's primary elections.
- *Six is the record* — The record number of sessions came in 1989-90 for the 71st legislature, which had six special sessions.