



University Interscholastic League

Making a World of Difference

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

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2024 • STATE

May 12, 2024



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UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

STATE • 2024

- 1. Saying the legislation violates constitutional protections of free speech, TikTok is suing the U.S. government to stop enforcement of a bill passed last month that seeks to do what?**
 - a. force ByteDance to store data from U.S. citizens on servers located in the U.S.
 - b. force ByteDance to sell TikTok
 - c. require ByteDance to make the code for the software open to all programmers
 - d. require ByteDance to ban the software from use by Chinese citizens
- 2. More than 60 House Republicans, led by Speaker Mike Johnson, visited Eagle Pass, Texas, in January. They threatened to starve the entire federal government of funding. What were the Republicans demanding?**
 - a. \$75 million for the war in Ukraine
 - b. \$1.2 million to crack down on the trafficking of dangerous drugs like fentanyl across the southwest border
 - c. a crackdown at the U.S.-Mexico border to choke off the flow of migrants streaming into the country
 - d. making student-led prayer and religious expression in public schools legal in all 50 states
- 3. For the first time ever, the Environmental Protection Agency said it is issuing a national regulation limiting the amount of what chemicals found in drinking water?**
 - a. certain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances
 - b. lead and cadmium
 - c. phthalates and bisphenols
 - d. hydrochlorofluorocarbons
- 4. The ship's crew sent out a mayday signal. The transportation authority police officers stopped traffic. Together, these actions helped to avert an even greater catastrophe. Where?**
 - a. Lake Ontario Bridge in Toronto
 - b. Interstate 35 bridge over the Mississippi River in Minneapolis
 - c. Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge, Tacoma, Washington
 - d. Francis Scott Key bridge in Baltimore
- 5. Oprah Winfrey said in late February she was stepping down from what board after more than a decade, causing stock in the company to fall 25%?**
 - a. Harpo Productions
 - b. Tennessee State University
 - c. WeightWatchers
 - d. Oprah's Angel Network
- 6. The fire became the largest on record in the state's history, scorching more than a million acres, devastating cattle ranches and consuming homes. Never before had anyone seen a fire quite like the Smokehouse Creek fire. Where?**
 - a. Maine and New Brunswick, Canada
 - b. Mendocino County, California
 - c. Eastern Alaska
 - d. The Texas Panhandle

7. **Although it cost billions more than anticipated and took years longer than originally projected, Plant Vogtle Unit 4 came online in Georgia this spring. Designed to power 500,000 homes and businesses without releasing any carbon, what type of power plant is it?**
 - a. hydroelectric
 - b. nuclear
 - c. solar
 - d. wind

8. **U.S. President Joe Biden signed a \$95.3 billion aid package, sending military aid to all of the following countries EXCEPT which one of the following?**
 - a. Ukraine
 - b. Taiwan
 - c. Israel
 - d. Mexico

9. **Marcia L. Fudge was only the second Cabinet secretary to leave U.S. President Joe Biden's administration. What agency did Fudge lead?**
 - a. Labor
 - b. Housing and Urban Development
 - c. Transportation
 - d. Education

10. **When the stamps were introduced in 2007, they cost 41 cents. In the fifth price increase in two years, the U.S. Postal Service raised the price of Forever stamps Jan. 21 to what?**
 - a. 68 cents
 - b. 63 cents
 - c. \$1.12
 - d. \$1.36

11. **High school students began taking a revamped version of the SAT in March, a version designed to reduce stress, according to the College Board. What's new about it?**
 - a. It's longer, 3 hours instead of 2 hours and 14 minutes.
 - b. The reading passage is longer.
 - c. It's fully digital.
 - d. Test-takers can no longer use an online graphing calculator during the math section.

12. **Mitch McConnell acknowledged that his views are out of step from the views of other Republicans. He plans to complete his full Senate term ending in 2027, but he said he plans to step down from what other role that he's held for about 17 years?**
 - a. vice president
 - b. Senate president pro tempore
 - c. chair of the Republican National Committee
 - d. Senate Republican leader

13. **Former President Donald Trump hawked Trump-branded sneakers at Sneaker Con, a gathering that bills itself as the "The Greatest Sneaker Show on Earth." Why did artist officials with the luxury brand Christian Louboutin take issue with the sale of the gold high tops with red soles?**
 - a. Louboutin, an ardent Democrat, owns the patent to the process used to paint the shoes gold
 - b. Louboutin has copyright on men's running shoes painted in patriotic colors such as red, white, blue and gold
 - c. As the inventor of men's athletic high-tops, Louboutin wants the royalties Trump didn't pay
 - d. Louboutin has a trademark on iconic red soles

14. **Major technology companies signed a pact in mid-February to adopt “reasonable precautions” to do what?**
- prevent AI tools from being used to disrupt elections around the world
 - remove “fake news” from their sites
 - build in spell-checkers and grammar-checkers that will, without human intervention, correct basic problems
 - block people under the age of 18 from signing on to social media
15. **The U.S. economy grew faster than any other G7 economy in 2023 and is on track to do so again in 2024. But which G7 country was the only one to have negative estimated gross domestic product for 2023?**
- France
 - Germany
 - Japan
 - United Kingdom
16. **Over 200 million people are diagnosed annually. Roughly 600,000 die as a result, nearly 80% of them children. To combat this disease, Cameroon became the first country to start routinely vaccinating children for what?**
- malaria
 - Ebola
 - rabies
 - dysentery
17. **Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is running for president as an independent, announced that he had filed paperwork to create his own political party in an effort to get his name on the ballot in California, Delaware, Hawaii, Mississippi and North Carolina. What party?**
- New Camelot party
 - We the People party
 - New Deal coalition
 - Post-Truth in Politics party
18. **“These coins embody her spirit, her perseverance, her tireless efforts and her desire for freedom for all individuals,” said U.S. Mint Director Ventris Gibson. The U.S. Mint released \$5 gold coins, \$1 silver coins and half-dollar coins to commemorate the bicentennial of whose birth?**
- Mary Ann Shadd, journalist
 - Harriet Tubman, an American abolitionist
 - Clara Barton, founder, American Red Cross
 - Susan B. Anthony, campaigner for women’s rights
19. **The Agriculture Department announced in April that it had finalized the regulation it had first proposed in February 2023 that made what changes to school meals?**
- School meals will contain less salt and sugar.
 - School meals will not contain chocolate (or other flavored) milk.
 - School meals will be free to everyone enrolled in a public school.
 - Any and all breads and bread products in school meals will be made of whole grains.

20. **Taylor Swift’s new album, 31 tracks, “The Tortured Poets Department,” broke what record?**
- It was Spotify’s most-streamed in a single day – more than 300 million streams.
 - Swift became the first female solo artist to top country music charts.
 - After this album, Swift, 20, became the youngest artist to win the Grammy Award for Album of the Year.
 - The black-and-white music video for one of the songs, “I Hate It Here,” achieved the highest female and solo 24-hour debut for a music video on YouTube with 65.2 million views.
21. **Similar to measures passed in Utah and Arkansas, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a law, SB3, banning children under age 14 from having access to which of the following after Jan. 1, 2025?**
- certain library books
 - social media
 - vaping products
 - mifepristone
22. **For the first time in 27 years, the U.S. government changed how it categorizes people by race and ethnicity, an effort that federal officials believe will more accurately count some populations. What change was made?**
- A Middle Eastern and North African category will be removed from the choices available for questions about race and ethnicity.
 - Questions about race and ethnicity that previously were asked separately on forms will be combined into a single question so respondents can pick multiple categories at the same time.
 - The words “Alaska Natives” and “Genetic admixture” will be added as more specific adjectives.
 - The revisions discourage the collection of detailed race and ethnicity data beyond the minimum standards, such as “Haitian” or “Jamaican” for someone who checks “Black.”
23. **For the first time in the 12 years of a report by Gallup, the U.S. dropped out of the top 20 on the list of happiest countries, now ranking at No. 23. What country topped the list?**
- Germany, which was No. 15 last year
 - Iceland, for three of the last five years
 - Finland, for the seventh year straight
 - Afghanistan, for the first year
24. **Shareholders of Digital World Acquisition Corp. approved a deal to merge with the former U.S. President Donald Trump’s media business. As a result, Trump Media & Technology Group will be traded on the Nasdaq stock market, possibly netting Trump billions of dollars. What is the Group’s flagship product?**
- TikTok
 - WhatsApp
 - WeChat
 - TruthSocial
25. **Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to fulfill Moscow’s goals in Ukraine and sternly warned the West against deeper involvement in the fighting. Specifically, what did he warn of?**
- a nuclear conflict that will mean the destruction of our civilization
 - the demise of the world’s bread basket and the resulting death of millions
 - closure of the Suez Canal and an end to affordable oil from the Middle East
 - creation of nuclear weapons by Iran, Iraq, Syria and North Korea

26. Although the effort failed, it was the closest the Texas Nationalist Movement has come in nearly two decades of trying to put what on the ballot for a vote?
- an independent candidate for president
 - the legalization of marijuana
 - school vouchers
 - Texit — Texas seceding from the U.S.
27. Normally, it's home to some 280,000 residents. Because the population swelled to more than 1.5 million people, Benjamin Netanyahu ordered his military to develop evacuation plans before any assault on what city?
- Rafah
 - Gaza
 - Damascus
 - Suez
28. The special counsel report found evidence that U.S. President Joe Biden willfully retained and shared classified information when he was a private citizen but concluded criminal charges were not warranted. The report from special counsel Robert Hur also said what?
- "In this two-tiered system of justice, the president is above the law."
 - He considered the case on the same merits as Trump's case, which is why they have similar outcomes.
 - Biden is a "a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory."
 - "I'm not charging Biden, and Trump should not be charged."
29. Just a day after he was sentenced to a decade in prison, former Prime Minister Imran Khan was ordered jailed for 14 years in a separate case, dealing him another heavy blow in his bitter feud with the country's powerful military. Khan was prime minister of what country?
- Tajikistan
 - India
 - Pakistan
 - Bangladesh
30. China's population stood at 1.4 billion in 2023. How did that compare to previous years?
- The population has been very steady at 1.4 billion thanks to the one-child policy.
 - China became the most populous country in the world, beating out India.
 - The population fell because of the 11.1 million people who died there of COVID-19.
 - The population fell for the second straight year. The birth rate decreased, and the death rate increased.
31. According to a study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* in late April, what did scientists find may protect against developing depressive symptoms, anxiety and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children and adolescents?
- cutting social media use
 - having an imaginary friend
 - physical activity
 - avoiding popular, and violent, computer games such as Mortal Kombat

32. In 2020, Zillow said prospective homebuyers would need to make \$59,000 to be able to buy a typical home in the United States. This year, Zillow and Bankrate both predicted prospective homebuyers would need to be making how much money per year for the same home?
- more than \$106,000
 - about the same amount, \$60,000
 - about 3.2% more, same as the rate of inflation, \$71,874
 - \$402,343
33. The Justice Department said it had recommended easing restrictions on marijuana in what could amount to a major change in federal policy. What change?
- It ends the criminalization of the drug.
 - It moves the drug from Schedule III to Schedule I.
 - It liberalizes marijuana policy, meaning it could be prescribed by a doctor.
 - It defines the drug as having no medical use.
34. Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed House Bill 2793 that sought to do what for all students at public schools across the state?
- block all social media sites on school-provided internet during school hours
 - limit cellphone use
 - provide free breakfast and lunch
 - give students access to free mental health care
35. Instagram says it's deploying new tools to protect young people, including a feature that will automatically do what?
- detect their ages and block underage users
 - use biometrics to determine their identity and then ask their parents if use of social media is permitted
 - remove any personally identifying data from public posts
 - blur nudity in direct messages
36. The Israel-Hamas war has tested free speech policies at universities in Texas and across the country. What action did Gov. Greg Abbott take regarding "the sharp rise in antisemitic speech and acts on university campuses"?
- He called the Legislature back into special session to deal with related issues.
 - He passed a law making antisemitic speech a "hate crime."
 - He issued an executive order requiring schools to discipline such speech.
 - He called for voters to remove from office any politicians who supported Israel.
37. The retailer's family of brands has struggled as inflation impacts its low-income shoppers' wallets. What company, therefore, plans to close hundreds of its stores nationwide?
- Dollar Tree
 - Walmart
 - Target
 - Kmart
38. To win the election as president, Taiwan's vice president, Lai Ching-te, whose party has emphasized the island's sovereignty, defeated an opposition party that favors reviving engagement with what country?
- Russia
 - China
 - Ukraine
 - North Korea

39. France, Jordan, the United Kingdom and the United States helped to intercept nearly all of the some 170 drones, 30 cruise missiles and 120 ballistic missiles that what country fired toward Israeli territory in mid-April?
- Yemen
 - United Arab Emirates
 - Iran
 - Bahrain
40. U.S. President Joe Biden awarded \$8.5 billion in grants to Intel during a tour of battleground states meant to sell his economic agenda. For what?
- to refund the cost of higher education for those in the computer industry
 - to develop an online system for artificial intelligence-based medical care
 - to block fake news from being distributed on social media
 - to bolster the nation's semiconductor production

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

Climate change is “the most important story, probably, on Earth,” according to Claudia Dreifus, an instructor in Columbia University’s master’s in sustainability management program, “and yet very difficult to report on.” Still, there has been plenty of news regarding climate change in the last year.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, most of Texas has warmed between one-half and one degree Fahrenheit in the past century. In the eastern two-thirds of the state, average annual rainfall is increasing, yet the soil is becoming drier. Rainstorms are becoming more intense, and floods are becoming more severe. Texas leads the nation in both the most frequent severe weather events and the most expensive weather events, accounting for 15% of all U.S. billion-dollar disasters, according to NOAA. From 1980 to 2024, Texas experienced 171 billion-dollar climate disaster events. As Houston meteorologist Daji Aswad wrote, “[Climate change] can be seen and felt across our community.”

Discuss some impacts of climate change in 2024 on the United States generally and some on Texas specifically, including, but not limited to, impacts on the environment, economy, agriculture, energy, political system and/or society.

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ANSWER KEY

ESSAY PROMPT

Discuss some impacts of climate change in 2024 on the United States generally and some on Texas specifically, including, but not limited to, impacts on the environment, economy, agriculture, energy, political system and/or society.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION POINTS PREPARED May 5, 2024 might include, but should not be limited to...

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

- *Insurance* — Insurance companies across Texas have dramatically increased home insurance rates this year, state filings show, as climate change spooks executives and inflation pushes up costs to rebuild after natural disasters. Texas rates have increased 22% on average so far in 2023, twice the national rate. More billion-dollar disasters have occurred in Texas this year than any other year on record.
- *Textbooks* — A Republican-controlled Texas State Board of Education rejected seven of 12 proposed science textbooks for eighth graders that for the first time will require them to include information on climate change. The 15-member board largely rejected the books because the books included policy solutions for climate change.
- *Power* — Power prices for Dallas soared to \$168.70 a megawatt-hour, which was the highest level in five years for this time of the year, according to Bloomberg Fair value data. Prices were still hovering around that level in April, an 82% premium versus a year earlier. The state's grid operator warned the same day of possible deficient power reserves from April 29 through May 1.
- *Extreme heat* — Each degree of warming in Texas slows the state's economy, an analysis by economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas found. Extreme heat this year may have cost the Texas economy \$24 billion, or reduced the state's nominal gross domestic product, by about 1 percentage point in 2023, the economists calculated.
- *Record high temps* — The summer of 2023 will go down as Texas' second hottest ever, with an average temperature of 85.3 degrees between June and the end of August, the state's climatologist said, just behind the blistering hot and extremely dry summer of 2011 when the average temperature hit 86.8 degrees. Climate Central reports 2023 as Earth's hottest year on record. This intense heat leads to stress on infrastructure — including road buckling, pipes bursting and home foundations cracking due to high temperatures.
- *ERCOT* — Over the summer and fall of 2023, ERCOT asked Texans to conserve energy 11 times. It also sent one energy emergency alert in September. In January, due to continued freezing temperatures, high demand and unseasonably low wind, operating reserves were low, forcing ERCOT again to ask Texans to conserve electricity use. Grid issues have been politically fraught since the deadly 2021 storm.
- *Wildfires* — The largest of the wildfires burning across Texas earlier this year, the Smokehouse Creek Fire, consumed more than 1 million acres, an area larger than the state of Rhode Island. "This is now the largest fire in recorded Texas history," said Erin O'Connor, lead public information officer for Texas A&M Forest Service. Climate change continues to increase the wildfire risk in Texas, which is part of the region in the United States most affected by high temperatures and long dry spells. Climate scientists warn that the wildfire season in the state is likely to grow longer and more intense.
- *Questions that didn't make the cut:*
 - Accelerated primarily by human-caused climate change, what did scientists find that has caused the Earth to spin less quickly than it would otherwise? the melting of polar ice
 - Given that cars and other forms of transportation are, together, the largest single source of carbon emissions generated by the U.S., one of the most significant climate regulations in the nation's history released in March will transform the American automobile market. How? It will ensure that the majority of new passenger cars and light trucks sold in the U.S. are all-electric or hybrids by 2032.
 - Scientists have calculated that if just shy of 2% of the sun's radiation is blocked, that would be enough to cool the planet by 1.5° Celsius, or 2.7° Fahrenheit. So, what did Israeli scientists propose? putting a million-ton sunshade about the size of Argentina into space
 - The European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service said that for January to November 2023, global average temperatures were the highest on record. What measure are scientists trying to avoid reaching? a global average temperature increase of 1.5° Celsius from pre-industrial norms
 - Leaders from all over the world attended COP28 in the United Arab Emirates. What were they there to discuss? a green world that can still have its oil