

# Synopsis of Problem Areas and Resolutions for 2020-2021

## PROBLEM AREA I: CLIMATE CHANGE

**Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase market-based regulations requiring reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.**

In 2002, the phenom from St. Louis, Nelly noted "It's getting hot in herre." While it is clear that he was probably not talking about climate change, seventeen years later he very much could be. The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report argues that the world needs to massively reduce greenhouse gas emissions to avoid an increase of 1.5-2 degrees Celsius. However, according to Julia Hollingsworth in a 2019 CNN article we are currently on a do-nothing trajectory which will yield a higher temperature increase. She writes "...if global temperatures rise 3 degrees Celsius by 2050, 55% of the world's population across...would experience more than 20 days of lethal heat per year, "beyond the threshold of human survivability."

Affirmative teams would be required to use "market-based" regulations to reduce emissions. These regulations offer an incentive or penalty to regulate high-pollution behaviors. Mechanisms could include: carbon pricing, emissions trading, renewable portfolio standards, renewable production targets, removal of fossil fuel subsidies, and energy efficiency standards. For each mechanism, there are multiple proposals, guaranteeing a variety of affirmatives. Specific advantage areas could include: climate, economic innovation, manufacturing, environmental justice, and modeling.

Negative teams have access to a wide range of economic sectors for disadvantages with quick timeframes (fossil fuels, innovation, agriculture) and private agent counterplans, in addition to a states and federalism debate. Negative teams could also defend why command-and-control regulations are better than market-based ones. Critical positions include: environmental managerialism, neoliberalism, and a variety of identity-politics based criticisms grounded in discussions of environmental racism.

As a community, we have never taken the opportunity to directly debate greenhouse gas emissions. This resolution forces debaters to focus on how to actually mitigate climate change rather than just focusing on just its potential impacts. The Trump administration has rolled back domestic climate policy. There is a broad consensus in the academic and scientific communities that the United States needs to do something to either mitigate or adapt to climate change, yet nothing is being done. Time is not on our side, and we must use the research and argumentation abilities of the next generation of leaders to help save the planet.

## PROBLEM AREA II: CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

**Resolved: The United States federal government should enact substantial criminal justice reform in the United States in one or more of the following: forensic science, policing, sentencing.**

The First Step Act was a bipartisan effort which made minor changes to the criminal justice system that didn't go far enough. What it did was spark a conversation which in turn produced a wealth of literature that would be ripe for debate. As the nation with the most incarcerated people per capita we have an obligation to find ways to reform our current system; this resolution offers students the opportunity to explore a plethora of options. Affirmatives can explore different ways to improve policing. These could include, but is not limited to, body cameras, increased community policing, instituting community review boards to investigate police misconduct or can overturn Supreme Court decisions that have increased protections for police officers. When seeking to address forensic science affirmatives can explore the accreditation standards for crime labs, change how evidence is handled, increase testing to establish validity in crime lab results, or institute statutory mechanisms that allows individuals to prove their innocence in court based on evolving science or expert reputation. With respect to the third area of sentencing, affirmatives can change/end mandatory minimum sentencing, can change the way drug crimes are sentenced, or could abolish/change the requirements for the

death penalty. Negatives can argue that reforming forensic science would have catastrophic impacts for evidence collection or would lead to an increase in mistakes made in crime labs. When negating policing, teams can argue that increased reform on policing would lead to officers leaving the profession, could mobilize the creation of underground militias, or would cause an increase of violence towards police officers. A generic circumvention argument available to negatives could be that those in power, specifically, Attorney General Barr, will choose to not enforce whatever the affirmative does. Negative teams have access to agent CPs that test the mechanism of the aff; there is a debate to be had on whether Congress or the courts are more effective at initiating reform in the Criminal Justice System. Disadvantage ground would include Federalism DAs that challenge the roles both the federal and state governments play in the criminal justice system, Backlash DAs in the form of police officers rebelling against the affirmative or funding DAs since a lot of the funding will have to be absorbed by state governments.

### **PROBLEM AREA III: COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE**

**Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its regulation of commercial agriculture in the United States.**

Agriculture affects our lives every day. The benefits of advancements in agriculture can be seen in the grocery store (year-round availability of a variety of fruits and vegetables, inexpensive meats, more organic products), at the gas pump (cheaper, cleaner fuel), and at the mall (cheaper clothes, natural fabrics). But the produce we see in the grocery store may be affecting the food security of people in our country and others, this cheap, clean fuel may be polluting our rivers and air, and these new clothes may be harming the workers who harvest the crops. Large commercial farms, responsible for the cheap prices and large quantities of produce, often use practices which cause these harms. Topsoil erosion, water contamination, antibiotic resistant diseases, and decreased genetic diversity are among the problems caused by these and other practices. The commercial agriculture debate can be whether or not commercial agriculture does more harm than good or whether or not it should be up to the federal government to fix it. This topic can appeal to high school students in different areas, not just rural students. Urban students will learn about where their food, clothes, and fuel come from and looking at how agriculture affects our climate. Affirmatives might regulate things like pesticide and chemical fertilizer use, antibiotic use, pollution, sustainable farming practices, regenerative agriculture, labeling. These regulations can target impacts like climate change, desertification, pushing out small farms, soil depletion, food waste, economy, trade. Negative disadvantages could include food security and accessibility, poverty, politics, economy, trade, immigration, federalism. Counterplan options might include states, consult counterplans, or courts. Critical ground will be fertile on this topic and as options include biocentrism, capitalism, race and gender.

### **PROBLEM AREA IV: ELECTION REFORM**

**Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its regulation of federal elections in one or more of the following: campaign finance, electoral interference, redistricting, voting rights.**

The last two years saw extensive inquiries made into the 2016 general election. That discussion, in addition to examining the role of dark money and gerrymandering, also has investigated the role that various state and non-state actors played in influencing the results of our elections. Additionally, recent months have seen the Supreme Court functionally sidestep the issue of partisan gerrymandering, while the amount of money in our elections increases and the transparency of such funding decreases. The 2020-2021 academic year, by virtue of having a general election about a quarter of the way into the season, will not only provide a continually updating literature base but will also empirically test many claims made by the evidence. Affirmatives will have the opportunity to address the structure of campaign finance, establish parameters for drawing legislative districts or require that states establish independent bodies to undertake this task, ensure that voting rights are protected or expanded (perhaps by allowing felons to have voting rights automatically restored upon completion of their sentence), or requiring states to create more resilient systems to protect the integrity of their voting process. Negative teams will have a range of options, ranging from federalism

disadvantage/state counterplans, court disadvantages, along with case arguments such as increasing the risk of voting fraud, court rollback arguments, or that limitations on campaign finance deny individuals their speech rights.

## **PROBLEM AREA V: HEALTH COVERAGE**

**Resolved: The United States federal government should ensure universal health coverage in the United States.**

The controversy over health coverage in America is a timely issue debaters will find in the news, television, and social media. Health coverage will likely occupy much of the media coverage surrounding the Democratic presidential candidates and in the showdown between the Democratic nominee and President Trump. Debaters will be able to follow this evolving issue and take part in how Americans will receive care and how much it will cost. In 2018 over a million Americans lost health coverage and some estimates peg changes could cause up to 20 million Americans to lose coverage. On the other hand, estimates for universal health coverage reach up to \$33 trillion.

On the affirmative, debaters could read cases about Medicare for All, Medicare for America, public option, Affordable Care Act litigation and/or reissue, importing foreign models for coverage, and specific types of care to be included in universal coverage. These cases are just a few preliminary options debaters can pursue.

On the negative, debaters will be able to execute a variety of strategies from which to engage the affirmative over different facets of the topic. Specific disadvantages include how the insurance, pharmaceutical, and health care industries would be harmed, as well as, a vibrant debate over the political and/or election ramifications of changing health coverage. Specific counterplans include the states counterplan and a variety of private actor/market counterplans, among many other counterplans about individual health coverage changes. There are many ways for critical arguments to access this topic, including but not limited to who receives care, how patients are treated when they receive care, who is traditionally excluded from care, the medical establishment generally, as well as how insurance/pharmaceutical industries are neoliberal.

**NFHS BALLOT FOR TOPIC SELECTION**  
**Proposed Topic Areas and Resolutions for 2020-2021**

Rank the topic areas 1 (best) through 5. The two areas receiving the *lowest* totals will be placed on the second ballot to select the 2020-2021 debate topic.

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Name:

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Organization:

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