

# Synopsis of Problem Areas and Resolutions for 2023-2024

## PROBLEM AREA I: CLIMATE CHANGE

**Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions in the United States.**

Climate change is a pressing global crisis that is dramatically changing life on earth. In many ways, climate change magnifies other global risks: it makes disease spread more likely, decreases access to necessities like food and water, drives poor health outcomes and increases the global disparity between developed and underdeveloped countries. Despite the importance of the climate change debate, fewer than half of K-12 teachers discuss the topic with their students. When it is discussed, it is most frequently taught in science classrooms, which, although important, ignores the social, economic and political elements of the topic. A 2022 study by health scientists found that the lack of pedagogical focus on building sustainable solutions to climate change has created a culture of despair, and is gradually undermining hope among America's youth. Thus, a debate topic focused on the contributing factors, harm and solutions to climate change has the potential to address a significant pedagogical gap in our nation's educational system.

The topic requires the federal government to increase restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions. Affirmative teams could argue for an economy-wide carbon tax, a cap-and-trade system, limitations on fossil fuel production or industry-specific emissions restrictions (trucking, construction, airlines, data centers, etc.). The specific mechanism, restrictions, is a significant change from the status quo's incentive-based approach to generating renewable energy. This ensures affirmative inherency and negative uniqueness. In addition, the topic has a set of counterplans and disadvantages that are unified across the topic. Specifically, negative teams could argue that the affirmative insufficiently addresses global warming by focusing solely on the United States, hurts resource-exporting economies, or that the affirmative causes stranded fossil fuel assets in the United States. The resolution "builds in" a counterplan that would allow the negative to argue for economic incentives or tax credits to promote renewable energy, instead of a coercion-based restriction on emissions. The negative could also fiat international actors like China or Russia, or domestically fiat the 50 states. However, well-constructed affirmatives would have a durable answer to the states counterplan, in federal modeling advantages and border-adjustment taxes. There is also a wealth of critical literature. Several affirmative teams would use market-mechanisms to restrict emissions, which strongly links to the capitalism critique. Environmental critiques also abound, including eco-feminism, anthropocentrism, managerialism, settler colonialism, etc.

The climate change resolution meets three key requirements for a strong topic. It fulfills an important pedagogical gap, affirmatives are certain to remain inherent (and disadvantages unique), and there is a strong set of unique negative positions that apply to nearly all affirmatives on the topic.

## PROBLEM AREA II: ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

**Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase fiscal redistribution in the United States by adopting a federal jobs guarantee, expanding Social Security, and/or providing a basic income.**

Economic inequality permeates all areas of American life and has a profound psychological and material influence on American society. Economic inequality influences life expectancy, physical and mental health, economic mobility and educational attainment. Inequality multiplies across generations and generates disenchantment with politics and our entire system of government.

Contemporary times have been dedicated to understanding this important issue from multiple perspectives. Economists, political scientists, legal scholars, philosophers, and people from many other fields have discussed

a wide range of causes and potential solutions to the inequality dilemma. Under the proposed topic, affirmative teams would fiscally redistribute resources in three areas: a basic income, federal jobs guarantee and expanded social security. Fiscal redistribution requires a process of tax and transfer of resources. In addition, each of those areas has multiple sub-areas that allow more affirmative specificity. For example, an affirmative could advocate a wealth tax to fund a universal or means-tested basic income. An affirmative could also advocate for a corporate tax to fund a larger Social Security payment or a lower Social Security age.

Negative teams will have a wide arsenal of arguments at their disposal, such as arguments about workability, economic disruption, political feasibility, funding tradeoffs, or alternative ways to address economic inequality without fiscal redistribution. In addition, the negative would have a strong critique of using economics as the starting point for structuring societal changes and a critique of capitalism that is particularly strong versus the jobs and Social Security parts of the resolution.

The public education system portrays itself as a promoter of expanded opportunity, yet fails to focus on inequality and potential solutions. Unfortunately, such a discussion has been relatively sparse in high school debate. Although economic inequality has been an ancillary feature of some recent topics, it has not been the core focus since the 2009-2010 social services topic. This topic allows everyone the chance to debate systemic economic inequality, not solely programs aimed to mitigate absolute poverty.

A season of debate, focused specifically on economic inequality, can create an opportunity to fully engage with such an immense literature base and form fully developed opinions on issues that directly impact their everyday lives. According to Inside Higher Ed, doing so is a precondition for “healing the wounds of the past, generating social solidarity and rebuilding a more just society.”