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2006-2007 National Service Debate Resolution Revision

Posting of the Debate Resolution

By Kent Summers

Some coaches and debaters have noticed that the 2006-2007 policy debate resolution now listed on the NFL and National Federation of High Schools (NFHS) Web sites is different from the national service resolution which appeared on the ballot for topic selection. The purpose of this article is to explain what happened between the time of the national vote and the most recent posting of the debate resolution.

First, some background concerning the process: The NFHS annually facilitates the topic selection process for policy debate. The process stipulates that a meeting of state delegates is held in August with approximately 10 potential topics to be considered initially. The NFHS Wording Committee, with input from all delegates and attendees at the meeting, carefully word one resolution for each of the potential topics. Finally, through a formal voting process, the delegates narrow the field of potential topics from ten to five. These five topics are then sent to the states with instructions to vote and narrow the field to two with a final balloting process held after that to select the topic. The national topic selected then comes back to the Topic Selection Committee which fine tunes the wording.

Historically, the Topic Selection Committee makes very few changes in wording following the final vote. Over the past few decades only two resolutions have been changed after the national vote, and both wording changes were minor. This year the Topic Selection Committee felt it was necessary to make more sizeable adjustments in the wording for reasons which are explained in the following paragraphs.

This process was followed to select the 2006-2007 topic and the ultimate choice

was National Service. After weeks of research on the new topic, however, the following problems with the original wording of the resolution were determined:

1. Too few affirmative cases (perhaps only one) fall under the umbrella of “mandatory national service.”

When the Topic Selection Committee worded the topic, it was believed that affirmative teams would be able to choose whether the people serving would be those just graduating from high school, persons being released from prison, persons receiving welfare payments or the elderly. Yet searches of the term “mandatory national service” disclose that this term is used almost exclusively in the context of a proposal to reinstitute the military draft with an option to serve in organizations such as AmeriCorps or the Peace Corps.

It should be remembered that this proposal is ONE affirmative case, not several. One cannot require that all young people serve in civilian programs, because such a requirement would eliminate the recruit pool for the volunteer army. Accordingly, an affirmative plan would have to combine military and civilian service in the same proposal. This means that almost all affirmative teams would be defending the same plan; they could have different reasons for doing so, but the plan would be roughly the same.

2. The proposal to reinstitute the military draft has too little support in the real world to make this viable as the only affir-

native approach.

Charles Rangel, U.S. Representative from New York, has introduced the Universal National Service Act in each of the last three congresses, but the bill has never had more than one or two cosponsors and has never received serious consideration. Senator Kerry originally proposed “mandatory national service” early in the 2004 campaign, but forcefully backed away from the proposal once opponents of the war began claiming that the Bush administration planned to reinstitute the draft. Toward the end of the 2004 presidential campaign both candidacies were attempting to distance themselves from the proposal and, in fact, to characterize the proposal as unrealistic. When the Rangel bill came to a vote in the House in 2004, it failed by a vote of 402 to 2 with only the sponsor and cosponsor voting for it.

3. Since only one affirmative plan clearly meets the “mandatory service” phrase, debate practice will not remain limited to this core area.

What debaters would likely do is to take apart the phrase “mandatory national service” into the following two parts: “mandatory” and “national service.” All affirmative plans (on any topic ever debated) have some mandatory components; in fact, debaters refer to the parts of their plan (again, on any topic) as “mandates.”

The only limiting phrase left, then, is “national service.” The problem with that phrase is that



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many executive departments (maybe all) have “national service” awards and projects. These national service projects go on within the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Communicable Disease Centers, the Department of Homeland Security, just to name a few. Finally, all of these projects would be done “by U.S. citizens” (the final phrase in the topic). The problem then, is that an affirmative plan with “mandates” could do almost anything within almost any federal agency. The topic, if allowed to go that broad, would become unmanageable.

Many of the problems outlined above were identified during the balloting process last fall but the stated selection process does not allow for any revisions to be made to the wording of the resolution at that point. The only opportunity to revise the wording of the resolution after the national balloting has begun is following the final vote, prior to the final ratification vote by the topic selection meeting attendees the following August.

What is the rationale for selecting the particular wording of the revised topic?

1. Why the “laundry list” (AmeriCorps, Citizen Corps, Senior Corps, etc.)?

The committee considered taking out the word “mandatory” and just leaving the topic the same otherwise. The problem with this approach was that the topic report and the topic paragraph intended this topic to focus on volunteer programs such as AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, and the volunteer army. Yet the term “national service” is used in too many other contexts (it appears in the literature of almost every executive agency and department).

There is precedent for the laundry list; this method was used in the privacy topic of 2000-2001. In this case it seems to be the best way to keep the debate focused on the group of programs that were

mentioned in the topic report and paragraph.

2. Why “increasing the number of persons serving” rather than “increasing participation” or “increasing enrollment” or “increasing enlistment?”

All of these possibilities were explored. “Participation” would allow an affirmative team to propose improved consultation. “Enrollment” is a term used primarily for volunteer programs for AmeriCorps but rarely for the military. “Enlistment” is a term used almost exclusively in the military but rarely for programs such as AmeriCorps or Peace Corps. Ultimately it just seemed best to say it in simple terms: “increasing the number of people serving.” This wording will prevent affirmative teams from focusing on providing more equipment to the military (i.e. body armor in Iraq or star wars defense systems), but rather on increasing the numbers enrolling/enlisting/serving. **For teams wishing to propose “mandatory national service,” this wording would still allow that.**

3. Why has “by United States citizens” been removed?

The revised topic is pretty long as it is. Also, the term “citizens” was removed from other resolutions that were written at the topic selection meeting in Minneapolis last August because it was agreed that it would generate a rather meaningless critique and topicality debate over the difference between residents and citizens. The phrase doesn’t add very much since the programs mentioned are all U.S. government programs.

A conference call was initiated by the NFHS at the suggestion of Bob Kanaby and Kent Summers in an effort to resolve the identified problems related to the wording of the 2006-2007 policy debate topic. Included in the conference call were members of the NFHS Wording Committee (Mike Wallmark, Chuck Ballingall, Ruth Kay, Frank Sferra, David Glass and Teresa Sparkman),

the original topic author (Sandy Patrick), the author of the topic introduction issue of the *Forensic Quarterly* (Rich Edwards), the chair of the NFHS Speech Advisory Committee (Randy Pierce) and Kent Summers, NFHS Assistant Director. During the conference call, the NFHS Wording Committee agreed unanimously on the need for a revision to the original resolution and to the revised wording. The attendees at the topic selection meeting were then given the opportunity to provide their opinion on the proposed revision to the resolution through a straw vote conducted via e-mail. There was overwhelming agreement that the following revised wording be approved for the 2006-2007 Policy Debate Topic:

The United States federal government should establish a policy substantially increasing the number of persons serving in one or more of the following national service programs: AmeriCorps, Citizen Corps, Senior Corps, Peace Corps, Learn and Serve America, Armed Forces.

At the topic selection meeting next August, additional time will be scheduled to discuss the entire topic selection process. The major focus of these discussions will be to determine if changes in the process are needed to:

Prevent the necessity of revising the selected resolution following the national balloting and avoid similar situations in the future.

- Or -

More clearly define a process that could be followed to allow input from debate schools throughout the nations should it become necessary to revise a future resolution following the national balloting.

- Or -

State clearly that no changes in the selected resolution are possible following the national balloting.

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