STOCK ISSUES

Significance – Is the problem in the status quo a significant problem? There are always problems in the SQ. Not enough money, not enough jobs, taxes too high, pay too low, No Student Left Behind… ☺ The key to this stock issue is whether or not the problem being fixed by the plan action is a significant problem. One trick used by affirmatives over the years is to choose a problem that is so tiny that the fix is easy and there is virtually no down side to fixing it.

Resolved: That the USFG should adopt a permanent program of wage and price control. This was an actual college debate topic. One potential affirmative plan action is to control the wages of the Head Librarian at the Library of Congress. At the time, he made more than some of the Senators. Senators found out about it and were basically refusing to do their jobs until this horrible wrong was corrected. This put the government at a standstill. So the plan action would reduce his salary to always remain just below that of a Senator.

So the plan, which only involves one person, has almost no downside. There are no harms to doing this other than to the one person. Perhaps s/he can’t buy as much milk as before. This is not considered much of a downside in the grand scheme of things.

But is the problem of one person making just a few dollars more than they should a SIGNIFICANT problem? That is one of the things the affirmative must show in order to win the debate.

Harms – Are there harms in the status quo that need to be addressed by the plan action? Well, since we have already established that there are significant harms, we have also established that there are harms. I guess harms should be talked about first, but the pneumonic I used for remembering the stock issues has them in this order… ☺

Inherency – Is the status quo able to solve the problems without plan action? This may sound like a no brainer, but the reality is that sometimes the solution for a current problem is right around the corner. Why would you vote for a plan action that is either unnecessary, or redundant. Using our example from above, what if the 2013 budget had a provision in it to reduce the salary of the Head Librarian to a level just below that of Senators… would you still vote for a plan to do this? Why take the time and effort and expense to do something that is going to happen anyway? And what if Senatorial salaries were going to go up in the near future… wouldn’t that also solve the harm?

Many times affirmatives see a problem and devise a solution without really looking to see what may already be in the works or actually being done about the problem already. This is not a stock issue that is often voted for as harms in the status quo usually exist because they are NOT being solved. That’s just the way things generally work. ☺

Topicality – Does the plan action fall under the umbrella of the resolution? If the resolution were asking for changes in wage and price control and the plan action were to fund a space mission to Mars, the affirmative would have a tough time showing how they are topical.

There are several reasons why topicality is important. One such reason is fairness (the negative was only prepared to debate against wage and price controls not space travel). To ask the negative to be prepared to debate EVERYTHING is unfair. Another reason is education (the topic was chosen so that we would be better educated about wage and price controls). Sure, space travel would be educational SOME OTHER TIME, but trying to focus on too many things loses the educational value of the one thing being focused on right now. However, I have always preferred jurisdiction as the main reason why topicality is the most important stock issue.

Let’s look at a court for our example. The first thing that any judge must decide in ANY case is whether or not s/he has the jurisdiction to even hear this case. If a criminal proceeding were brought in front of a civil judge, the first ruling would be that s/he is not allowed to hear the case. Even before any of the merits of the case were discussed it would be kicked out of this court. The same is true of the judge in a debate. One of the first things the judge should decide is whether or not s/he should even evaluate the merits of the case. If the affirmative “case” is not topical, then nothing else really matters. It is thrown out of this court (or this debate round). Of course the judge in a debate will listen to the entire debate and wait for all the arguments to be made before a decision is made. The negative has to PROVE that the case isn’t topical, and that could take the entire debate to prove one way or another.

Solvency – Does the plan action solve the harms enumerated by the affirmative? This is often some of the most difficult evidence to find, but it is necessary to show that the plan action will, indeed, solve the harms. It’s not difficult to find an author that says ABC is necessary to solve the problem of XYZ, but when looking for the reverse…. Well, that is a bit tougher. So finding a harm that needs to be taken care of in ANY topic is easy. Finding the solution to that harm, while still remaining topical, may take a bit of time. Be prepared to spend some time looking.

Be sure that your author is talking apples to apples though, as often affirmatives lose on solvency because their authors are not talking about the exact same plan that the affirmative uses. Even a slight difference can lose you the debate.