

excessive costs is Prohibition. From 1920 to 1933 the sale of alcohol was prohibited in the United States. It was described as the 'Noble Experiment', with the intention of preventing the damage drinking did. Instead, the law was widely disrespected, and organised crime gangs became enormously powerful.

All right then, let's minimise the costs. We'll just go for a 1% tax on streaky bacon. When it's sold in packs of four. On Thursdays. That's a tax, and it's on meat.

That will annoy no one. It is almost impossible to criticise. It will also have virtually no impact on the environment or on dietary choices, so will get you nowhere near the long term goal implied by the motion.

So what's the answer?

The art of constructing an effective mechanism is to find the sweet spot somewhere between the impacts and the costs, maximising the former, minimising the latter. In this case, a 10% tax on all sales of meat would be about right; enough to nudge people towards different behaviour while still being enforceable.

But there's more to constructing an effective mechanism.

As well as hitting this balance between **impact** and **costs**, the mechanism also needs to be:

- **Practical** - something that can be done.
- **Enforceable** - something that people will accept.
- **Simple** - something that can be explained in less than five minutes.

The 10% example meets these criteria. There is plenty of precedent for taxing the sale of certain products, e.g. cigarettes, showing it can be done, so it is **practical** and **enforceable**; and it is **simple** enough to be explained and grasped in the short time allowed in a debate.

What do you do with the mechanism if you are the opposition?

You have to accept the mechanism as constructed by the proposition, in the same way as you have to accept the motion

as defined by the proposition. Look for its weaknesses: if it has too many costs (the 1,000% tax example), attack the costs. If it has too little impact (the streaky bacon example) attack the lack of impact. If, on the other hand, the proposition have managed to hit the sweet spot, you're probably best off leaving it alone, and focusing instead on the principles implicit in this motion, in this case defending people's freedom to buy and eat what they like.

So, to sum up:

If you're the proposition:

- Find the sweet spot between impact and cost.
- Keep the mechanism practical, enforceable and simple.

If you're the opposition:

- Find the weakness in the mechanism and attack it.
- If it's a strong mechanism, leave it alone and go for principles instead.

Find the
sweet
spot
between
the
impacts
and the
costs

3

Signposting your speech

I love walking in the countryside.

However, sometimes it is quite a stressful experience.

When I walk in the English countryside, much of my time is taken up with looking at the map, holding it sideways, upside down, the wrong way round, looking at this tree and that mountain, trying to work out if we should have turned left at that stile or right at that stream, trying not to argue with whomever I'm walking with. This is partly because I'm rubbish at map reading, but it is also because there are very few signposts in the English countryside.

When I walk in Switzerland, though, it's a different matter. There, they have neat, tidy, yellow signposts every mile or so pointing you in the right direction and telling you that it is 1 hour and 10 minutes to the lake, 1 hour and 40 minutes to the river, and 2 hours and 5 minutes to the town (where you will find toilets, a bus stop and a cafe serving hot chocolate, with vegan options also available). Walking in Switzerland (doing most things in Switzerland) is a very low stress experience.

Keep the
mechanism
practical,
enforceable
and simple