WHAT ARE THE STOCK ISSUES IN POLICY DEBATE?

The place to begin in understanding the argument structure of policy debate is with the *stock issues*. The five stock issues describe the arguments that the affirmative team must win in order to win the debate. These stock issues are topicality, significance of harm, inherency, solvency, and desirability.

The *topicality* stock issue means the affirmative team must advocate the resolution. In each policy debate the affirmative team must present a plan in its first affirmative constructive speech. The *plan* provides a detailed description of what the affirmative team has chosen to advocate.

Imagine the resolution says that the federal government should "increase public health assistance to sub-Saharan Africa." The affirmative plan might read something like this: "The United States will double its funding for the president's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) with all the additional funding designated for sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, the U.S. will eliminate the current earmark requiring that HIV/AIDS prevention funds be spent on abstinence-based programs."

To be topical, the affirmative plan must fall under the umbrella created by the wording of the resolution. In the previous example, the affirmative plan must propose a U.S. federal government program (not the United Nations or the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria). Also, the plan must propose a "public health" program for sub-Saharan Africa. There would be a clear violation of topicality if the affirmative plan proposed to give military aid to Africa because the resolution calls for "public health" assistance.

Notice, however, that the affirmative case can be topical without proposing everything that falls under the umbrella of "public health" assistance. The affirmative team can choose whether it wants to deal with HIV/AIDS, malaria, water/sanitation issues, or various neglected tropical diseases. The affirmative team is given considerable leeway to select its own case area so long as it falls within the boundaries created by the wording of the resolution.

On the other hand, the negative team can win the debate if it can show that the affirmative plan falls outside the boundaries of the resolution. It is not enough that the affirmative plan meets most of the words in the resolution; the negative can win on topicality if it can show that the affirmative plan fails to meet even one of the words in the topic.

The *significance of harm* stock issue requires the affirmative team to demonstrate that the present system (or *status quo*, as debaters often call it) has a serious defect at present. The nature and severity of harm required can be judged only in the context of a particular topic. Consider the following examples of harm arguments: a basic human