

# 2009 NFL Nationals

## United States Extemp Topic Area Analysis

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: Due to some topic areas being reused on a yearly basis by the National Forensic League, some of Colin's analysis that appeared on Extemp Central's website last year was pieced into this topic area analysis.*

As was done for the Catholic Forensic League (CFL) national tournament, Extemp Central provides you with this topic area analysis for the United States extemp portion of next week's NFL national tournament in Birmingham, Alabama. While it appears this year that there will be a stronger overall pool of talent in International extemp, conforming to the normal pattern of the last decade that does not mean that International extemp is the harder tournament to navigate.

When people ask me which area of extemp I think is harder to win at NFL, I always answer United States extemp. My decision could be biased, as I did United States extemp all four years (although I regret never dabbling in International extemp), but I do believe that United States extemp has more variables tied into achieving a high level of performance than International extemp for two reasons.

First, it is very difficult to write thirteen rounds of questions about the United States. Yes, we are a great country and many of the things that take place here establish policy that significantly alters the globe. However, trying to come up with nearly thirty questions per round about issues only in the United States is very difficult. This is compounded by a problem all extempers are familiar with at some local tournaments: a lack of quality questions. I remember senior year the first question I drew was "*Why does the right hate public education?*" I also have encountered questions about whether prisoners should have to work, questions about timber companies, and questions about water problems in Utah. All of these questions show that there is a depth to U.S. extemp that can get very nit picky and there might come a time in the tournament when an extemper is going to be forced to talk about an issue they may never have heard of or not have a lot of substantial material to support a speech in their file boxes.

Second, most judges are more familiar with topics found in U.S. extemp rounds than International extemp rounds. If an informal poll was conducted at the national tournament, I would be willing to bet that there are more judges who know about the current Supreme Court nominee than about Britain's expenses scandal. This presents U.S. extempers with two issues. The first issue is that judges are going to be somewhat aware of what you are talking about so it is harder for those extempers to "b.s." their way through rounds (although that may work to many educated competitors advantage). Another issue is that for some topics, such as abortion, affirmative action, etc. that are quite controversial, judges have biases that are tough to shake. I remember drawing abortion, Title IX, and slave reparations in round ten of NFL my junior year and I am convinced that the bad topic draw I achieved in that round and the biases my judges were bound to have, was part of the reason why my cumulative score took a hit.

To assist extempers to navigating the tournament, this topic area analysis hopes to serve as a preview of what extempers can expect to see in each round and provide some practice questions so they can be ready for next week's event. Keep in mind, these are only predictions and opinions of the writers based on our prior experiences at the tournament. We can be wrong, but I

would like to say that most of our predictions about last year's topics (and my prediction about the Health topic being the CFL semi-final or final topic area) were right.

### **Topic Area #1: Education and Issues of Youth**

When preparing for this topic area, it is easy to become fixated on the first half of the title and neglect the ambiguous words following the ampersand. Clearly, education is an important issue, and if past precedent continues, at least 60% of the questions in this round will focus on educational issues. To prepare for these topics, try to go beyond the staples of No Child Left Behind, Charter Schools and College Aid. Look at graduation and retention rates, inner city schools, the effects of Teach For America, and American Student's standing in the world. Also, be aware that it is quite popular to critique America's current educational practices, as there are many metrics showing that our students are underperforming. To stand out in an education round, consider (if it is appropriate to the question) offering new ideas or solutions instead of simply bemoaning the status quo. Finally, remember that of the issues covered in National Extemp, education is perhaps one of the most impacted by local politics. Instead of focusing your speech and your proposed solutions on National initiatives, discuss the impact that city governments and school boards can have. Compare the policies of various state governments to see which have been more effective. And remember, many of the judges at the National Tournament are either debate coaches, former debate coaches, or assistant coaches, all of whom are likely to have spent time teaching at a public or private high school. Education issues may resonate with them quite strongly, particularly ones which pertain to teacher's pay and benefits or governmental curriculum oversight.

It is also notable here for extempers to think about how the current state of the economy could impact the education system. Across the country, teachers are losing their jobs and afterschool programs are being cut as school districts budgets are collapsing due to poorly performing state economic structures. Looking at state budget pictures, and discovering case studies of how these budget cuts are impacting the education structure will provide some unique and insightful analysis into the problems confronting American education and some solutions we might want to implement to keep educational funding intact.

As for the "Issues of Youth" component, ask yourself what national policy issues have impacted you and your peers. Use your personal experience to your advantage in brainstorming potential topics. This topic area commonly includes questions about drug use, drug prevention, and teen pregnancy. It is also a reasonable place to expect questions about gangs, school violence, and anti-bully initiatives. California's recent efforts to curb youth spending on violent video games might appear in this topic area as well if it does not arise as an epic constitutional question. But this is just the surface. Unlike an education topic where you may find yourself speaking to relative experts (teachers), when you speak on a "youth issues" topic, you are speaking as one who may have recently experienced these things. Do not be afraid to describe other issues that you think might be at play, as long as they are relevant to the topic. The judge will be impressed at your unique insight. But as always, try to balance these personal analytics with expert opinion and reported data. A good way to supplement your usual articles for this area is to cut and highlight some evidence from peer-reviewed studies of adolescent and child psychology, or on youth social behavior.

#### *Practice Questions*

1. Should No Child Left Behind be modified?
2. Have efforts nationwide to stop bullying been effective?

3. How can the U.S. do a better job at stopping teen drug use?
4. Should the federal government put tuition caps on public universities?
5. How can U.S. schools better compete with their international counterparts?

## **Topic Area #2: America: Challenges and Opportunities**

Did someone just say finals topic? If so, then your right. This **IS** going to be the finals topic, no and's, if's, or but's about it. How can I tell this? Because the topic is so broad. However, at least the topic area this year tries to sound engaging. Extempers who are aware of last year's topic area analysis remember Colin and I bemoaning "America" and "the World." Typically, the finals topics for U.S. extemp cover a wide range of issues, from trade and economic policy to hard hitting social topics such as poverty, illegal immigration, and Social Security. When PER/ASPA was the U.S. extemp sponsor, there were a lot of questions about public policy, but that seems to have evaporated with their sponsorship the last several years.

In preparing for this round, I would recommend that extempers try to identify some of the domestic situations that will cause the Americans to make tough choices in the coming years. Such situations could be entitlement reform, troubling social questions such as gay marriage or how to contain extremist groups (a topic ever more present after the Tiller abortion killing), whether to reform the Electoral College, how America can successfully win the war on terrorism, and how racial relations could be improved. Think broad for this topic area because the questions will most likely be broad and force you to identify or break down policies and the motivations behind those policies.

Also, since these questions will ask you to assess both the current and future direction of America, you may find it useful to get a generic CIA factbook profile of the United States for your boxes and a profile from the *Index of Economic Freedom* for your boxes as well. These can provide some statistics that can be quickly referenced in case you would like to use those statistics to advocate the chances of a particular policy succeeding or failing.

If you are skilled and/or lucky enough to hit this topic area, then I wish you Godspeed and hearty congratulations on joining the elite club of NFL finalists.

### *Practice Questions*

1. What is the American dream?
2. Have affirmative action policies been beneficial for America?
3. Should America welcome or fear the rise of China?
4. How can the polarization that exists in American politics end?
5. Is it time for America to get serious about entitlement reform?

## **Topic Area #3: The American War on International Terrorism**

While the Obama administration would probably not want us to use the term "war on terrorism" anymore, the NFL has retained it for this topic area. What makes the wording of this topic area interesting is that it assumes that the war on international terrorism is a U.S.-led effort. Similarly, it is going to be interesting how the NFL question writers differentiate which topics to use in this round and then in the National Defense and Homeland Security round.

Because of its absence from the topic areas this year, I see this as the major foreign policy round in U.S. extemp. The questions that emerge in this round will probably be how America can work

with its allies overseas such as Saudi Arabia, Great Britain, and Pakistan to resolve international terrorism. Questions dealing with America's use of international bodies such as the United Nations or initiatives such as the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) may also come into play here.

While the biased assumption to make about this topic area is that it will only be focused on the Middle East, extempers should not forget that there is a major conflict against terrorism occurring in South Asia. I would go as far as to suggest that questions about insurgent actions in Afghanistan, the Taliban's actions in Pakistan, and the defeat of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka are this year's equivalent to the Hezbollah, Hamas, and al-Qaeda topics of yesteryear. Also, if there is a round where U.S. extempers could talk about Somali piracy it might be this round.

Although North Korea or Iran could pop up in this round I do not expect them to. The only chance of that happening is if extempers were dealt a question about the propensity of either government to give nuclear arms to terrorist groups. However, due to these countries having a more an implication for U.S. defensive policies in the Middle East and East Asia, I do not anticipate seeing those countries pop up here. I also anticipate that any questions extempers get about Iraq and Afghanistan will be directly about their role in fighting terrorism. Extempers should not forget that. It is an instinctive reaction to see those questions and immediately want to discuss your favorite issue relating to Iraq or Afghanistan, but you must stay focused on the terrorism aspect. If you do not discuss how the stability of either country's government relates to the issue of terrorism and simply want to discuss why their governments are bad or imploding then you are not answering the question at hand.

Topic areas like these are why domestic extempers should still clip news sources from other countries. For example, cutting Al Jazeera may have some more local analysis about al Qaeda elements. Cutting newspapers from the AllAfrica database will provide some regional insights into the stability of the Somali government and the impact piracy has had on the region. After all, if you give a speech about foreign issues and only have American news references, how do you know your really getting the full perspective on an issue?

### *Practice Questions*

1. How important is it that the U.S. know where Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is located?
2. Has the U.S. fought the war on terrorism too unilaterally?
3. How can the U.S. improve its public relations deficit with the world's Muslims?
4. Should the U.S. be willing to talk directly with Hamas?
5. Should the U.S. do more to help Somalia?

### **Topic Area #4: Science, Technology, and the Environment**

Like the Education category, it is easy to misread this phrase as simply "The Environment." Preparing for the scientific topics is every bit as important. Expect questions which ask about public policy implication of recent scientific developments, as well as questions about the state of scientific research and education in America. Some time reading and printing journals like Nature or Scientific American will help you in this area, even if you are not a science person, as these and other publications generally contain articles summarizing recent developments in science and technology before delving into the complicated details. Naturally, you do not want to find yourself discussing much scientific theory in an extemp speech, but if you can cite a scientific journal as part of your evidence for the efficacy or economic benefits of some new technology, you will sound much more convincing than someone still pulling citations from Newsweek.

Do not, of course, neglect the environment; after all there is considerable overlap between the two fields. Many questions about the environment leave room for a good discussion of the various alternative energy sources being explored, or the environmental impacts of new technologies. A speech about nuclear power, for example, could greatly benefit from a scientific explanation of why nuclear waste is a problem. Just don't go over your judge's head!

I would wager that "the Environment" part of this topic area will be where most of the questions come from. This is due to the Copenhagen summit on climate change in December 2009 being seen as a milestone in the world's efforts to come up with an international climate agreement to replace the Kyoto protocol and efforts by the Obama administration to begin reducing America's greenhouse gas emissions through increased fuel mileage policies. Also, questions about how America can reduce global warming, especially the recent push for a cap and trade system will emerge in this round.

It may also be prudent for extempers to look at Lisa Jackson, Steven Chu, and Ken Salazar, who are the heads of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Interior. Questions about their management of agencies, which impact the topics listed above, are likely to emerge here if not in the "New President" round.

Outside of the realm of the scientific, environmental questions will likely focus on policy questions, such as regulatory methods, funding sources, and impacts on the economy. You may also see more obscure issues like industrial waste management or overfishing. For all of these issues, be sure to consider not only researching America's policies, but those of other countries. In many cases there are European or even South American nations which have taken different approaches to solving the environmental problems we face here. Comparing and contrasting these methods can add insightful and memorable analysis to your speech.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Would a cap and trade system kill the U.S. economy?
2. Are electric cars feasible?
3. Can the U.S. still reach the moon now that the space shuttle program is retired?
4. Are the benefits of stem cell research oversold?
5. Is Lisa Jackson too extreme to run the EPA?

### **Topic Area #5: American Politics**

To many Extempers who specialize in US extemp, this category is the most comfortable. Many of us are drawn to speech and debate initially from our interest in political argument and our strong feelings about one side or particular candidates.

That makes this topic area both exciting and dangerous. If you attempt to be too partisan, you risk offending the judge. On the other hand, if you are too bland, you risk appearing uninspired in a round full of extempers who are speaking at their most passionate. My advice is simply to approach the issues the way you read about them in the foreign press. When you see a BBC article on the US presidential race, or on massive confrontation in the senate, the tone of the article somehow manages to convey a sense of impartiality without sounding detached. Treat the scenario as though you were on the outside looking in, and speak as though you were saying "from this outside perspective, I can see that both sides have their moments of absurdity, and both have some valid points. Nevertheless, it is clear that X is the correct decision which should be

made.” Under no circumstances should you finish a speech without taking a side; just try to make it clear your conclusions are drawn from facts, not partisanship and ideology.

Since this season had a presidential election, expect to see a few “reflective” election questions sprinkled into the mix. These will ask you to assess how John McCain might have won the election, why he lost the election, why Obama won the election, why the Republicans were defeated so handily, and possibly ask you if McCain made a poor choice in selecting Sarah Palin as a running mate.

Domestic politics questions also ask you to assess future prospects, especially in terms of elections. The 2010 Congressional elections loom large, especially for the Republican Party. I can bet you with near 100 percent certainty that a generic “Who will win the 2010 Congressional elections?” question will emerge in this round. I would suggest that extempers get a sheet of information about the senators who are up for re-election in 2010 and start assessing the prospects of further Republican gains or losses. Remember when arguing about the 2010 elections that if you do not have specific races to mention that your speech will be seen as a generic, “run of the mill” elections speech. However, if you have names, races, and local information about those races (which helps if you live in some projected battleground areas such as Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut), it will enhance your speech.

With elections in mind, you will face many questions about the state of the Republican Party and the effectiveness of its chairman, Michael Steele. Steele has made it a large point of his strategy to win the governorship of Virginia back and some Republicans are looking to take down John Corzine in New Jersey as well. As with the 2010 elections questions, sizing up the Republicans chances of those seats can assist in any speech discussing whether the Republicans can ever emerge as a strong party again. Analyzing future presidential prospects for the Republicans will also factor into this round as extempers will get to talk about Mitt Romney, Sarah Palin, and Bobby Jindal. However, when facing these questions it is just as important that you communicate how they can **unite** a fractured Republican Party as opposed to simply winning a general election. Remember, to win a general election the Republican nominee in 2012 will have to fight through a bruising and polarizing primary. Emphasizing how a nominee could win the primary and bring the party together quickly is critical to any speech of this type. A final type of question for the Republicans concerns former vice-president Dick Cheney. No one has hit harder against the Obama administration. A question could be about Cheney’s emergence as a face of the Republican Party and whether that is helpful or hurtful to the party’s image.

However, politics questions are not purely aimed at elections or Republicans. Nancy Pelosi has gotten herself in hot water over her allegations of lying by the CIA and what she did or did not know about waterboarding, causing some to question her leadership of the Democrats in the House. Also, Democrats overreaching has been a concern all year and potential efforts to push through climate change legislation and healthcare legislation by reconciliation as opposed to full floor debate has strengthened concern that the Democrats could be setting themselves up for their own downfall. Therefore, there could be questions emerging about the chances of Democratic overreach or how the Democrats should manage their majorities in the Senate and the House.

And of course, I would be amiss to say that there will probably be a question about the Minnesota Senate race which is still to be decided.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Currently speaking, is Dick Cheney a benefit or detriment to the Republican Party?

2. Will Democrats continue to gain seats in Congress in 2010?
3. Should Sarah Palin be the Republican nominee in 2012?
4. Will a push for universal healthcare reform doom Democrats in 2010?
5. Why has the GOP lost the Northeast?

### **Topic Area #6: Business and the Economy**

As I mentioned during the CFL brief, there is no topic area this year that has gotten more attention than this one, especially since the fall. With oil prices back on the rise, concerns about the federal government's fiscal stability, the fall of much of the U.S. automotive sector into bankruptcy, the collapse of the housing market, and with economists still forecasting pain in terms of job losses throughout the rest of the year, the economy is the first and foremost concern of many Americans. It is highly probable that your judges will have some experience with the economy, whether they have experienced pay cuts, job layoffs, or know someone that has and they will have a bias about the federal intervention that has taken place to put the economy right again (with bailouts, stimulus packages, etc.). As such, it will be very important for an extemper to bring these concerns of ordinary Americans to life in any speech you give about the economy, whether it deals with trade policy, CEO pay, or how to fix certain economic sectors. *Newsweek* used to be a master at these personal pieces and incorporating examples of how economic policies affect ordinary Americans can make a speech seem less formulaic and more down to earth, a style many "lay" judges will appreciate.

Also, the economy round is another that most extempers will either instinctively hate or enjoy. If economics is your thing, go for it, but be warned that, as with science and technology, you run the risk of either boring your judge or going way over their head. It is not valuable to drop a great deal of economic jargon if you do not adequately explain its meaning. You are trying present a convincing argument for your position, not simply impress the judge with your vocabulary. On the flip side, if you feel you do not have a strong grasp on economics, don't panic, and let the experts do the talking for you. Citing top economists and Business leaders can allow you to bring in a great deal of evidence on a topic without your having to take a summer class in Supply Side theory.

Be careful in this round of also spewing lots of statistics and thinking the judge can make sense of the numbers. Economics does have a lot to do with statistics, but it also has to do with people's behaviors in response to certain economic situations. As such, if you are going to use statistics, impact them to your question. Do not discuss GDP figures unless you explain what they mean and why they are important when assessing the country's political and economic future.

Aside from the bailouts, stimulus, and ethics of federal intervention questions you might see in this round, America's relationship to other countries and how the economic crisis could hurt our economic relationships with those countries is a topic extempers should be made aware of. Already, China is starting to show concerns about how America is spending too much money and there have been global disagreements between the Obama administration and Mexico over NAFTA. A generic question about protectionism will come up in this round, so be aware of it here.

I always suggest in preparing for this topic area that an extemper separate their economics files accordingly. If an extemper just has a big file that says "economy" they are going to be hurting in this round. I remember in my files we had subdivisions for pensions, CEO pay, banking, hedge funds, housing, etc. This makes it easy when you are hit with questions about a particular sector of the economy, which will happen to you in this round.

Finally, know that it is a cardinal offense to confuse things like the national debt and the trade deficit.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Will the government's rescue of GM ultimately fail?
2. Is it a good idea to let the Bush tax cuts expire?
3. How can the U.S. assure China that its dollar assets are safe?
4. If card check is instituted, will it prolong the economic recession?
5. Is inflation or deflation a bigger threat to the U.S. economy?

### **Topic Area #7: U.S. Immigration Policy**

It is interesting to see this as a topic area, due to this topic falling out of the political mainstream over the last two seasons. However, immigration policy has been a staple of U.S. extemp for as long as I can remember and my final round speech in 2003 was about immigration policy. Extempers should remember that the topic does not read "Illegal Immigration Policy." Instead, it reads "Immigration Policy." It is a gut instinct to read the word immigration and start assuming the worst about America's immigration problems. However, it is entirely possible that you will face questions in this round about how the U.S. can adjust its current immigration policy to accommodate economic needs, especially in math, science, and technology. There have been reports for years that the U.S. needs to do more to get skilled immigrants into the U.S., so policy questions pertaining to that need could arise here.

However, many of the questions you may encounter in this round will be about illegal immigration and its impacts on America's political, social, and economic environment. Extempers will face questions about whether America's current drive for a more technologically sound border can work, if the U.S. should consider an amnesty for illegal immigrants into the U.S., whether we should withdraw social services from illegal immigrants, and if English should become America's national language. There will also be questions about illegal immigrants impact on U.S. workers and minority communities, a topic that is made even more urgent by the economic crisis.

There is also a foreign element involved in this question that extempers need to consider. All experts agree that if the U.S. is to establish a stable policy for handling immigrants that we need closer and more positive relations with the countries these immigrants are coming from. Since the illegal immigration problem deals disproportionately with Mexico, an extemper will want to discuss Mexico's political and economic turmoil. Also, the Obama administration's overtures to Cuba have an impact on this topic area as we are trying to stabilize migration flows.

It would be wise for U.S. extempers to look back at waves of immigration that have affected this country before and use those historical parallels in speeches. As a history buff, I appreciate when extempers use historical examples because some of the answers to the problems we face today can be found when we examine what was done in the past. Reading about the waves of Irish, southeastern European, and Chinese migration flows would help a speech, especially in looking at immigration legislation passed during those migration flows, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act in the late 1800s.

Finally, for this topic area keep in mind that immigration is a very hot social topic. Accepting different peoples into a national culture is not an easy process and the prospect of accepting



scores of new groups into the United States makes many people feel uneasy. However, lumping all immigrants, legal or illegal, together is the wrong approach and will show your ignorance on this issue. Similarly, it will help if you try to tell both sides of the story. Explain the factors that are causing people to want to leave their homelands for the United States and balance it with the current needs of the American government to its citizens. It is through this balanced approach that you can best sell your answer and you will make yourself appear more educated as a result.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Are current U.S. immigration policies depriving the country of the skilled labor force it needs?
2. Does the federal government need to do a better job targeting companies who employ illegal immigrants?
3. Should English be made the official language of the U.S.?
4. Can a high tech border solve America's illegal immigration woes?
5. Does the U.S. need to do a better job assimilating immigrants?

### **Topic Area #8: Crime & Punishment**

Typically, the NFL has designated this round as "Crime and Justice." It appeared in semi-finals my junior year and has usually made an appearance in the elimination round portion of the tournament. These questions often asked you to analyze judicial rulings and how America could stop crime or win battles against criminal trends. This year, with the topic area being changed to "Crime and Punishment", there may be some small changes to the questions you will see, but I honestly believe the "justice" component will still matter. Of course, we could all be wrong and the NFL could torture U.S. extempers with questions from Froydor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, but I find that unlikely (although I did like the book).

For this topic area, be familiar with recent, landmark court decisions, particularly the rulings of the Supreme Court. Know what it means to argue that something is Constitutional or Unconstitutional, rather than simply "right" or "wrong." This category also frequently contains topics about the justice system itself, so you will want to know a bit about the judicial process and recent events surrounding the US Department of Justice. Legal issues are complicated, and sometimes require specific knowledge, so don't expect questions that require you to make the judgments that only an attorney could sort out. But do expect a meta-analysis of these judgments, their implications in American lives, and the precedents they set for the future. This round is also where I would expect to see the bulk of the questions about torture and gun control. As usual, be sure you have an understanding of the issue that allows you to answer more questions than simply "Should torture be permissible?" or "Do we need more gun control?" Research the specific legal and political debates and consider what laws might likely be passed in the future.

For the crime component of this topic, be prepared in particular to discuss crime prevention techniques and also the causes of crime in various parts of the country. It can't hurt to familiarize yourself with some of the more famous efforts to combat crime which have gone on across the country. New York touts its new police methods as having cleaned up the city dramatically during the last decade, and Los Angeles has recently begun using new approaches as well. Also, a look into police tactics, whether it be racial profiling, DNA collection, or the use of tasers (good for a "Don't taser me bro!" joke) can be expected here.

For the punishment component, look at how the American judicial system handles criminals. Questions about prison reform will be here and examples of those questions pertain to how we can curb sexual violence in prison, whether we need to have drug offenders in prison, and if

America should abolish the death penalty. For each of these topics, statistics from the Department of Justice or studies that detail recidivism rates and economic benefits might be good to have. There have been many economic studies done over the last few years on whether it would help state economies to abolish the death penalty, an argument many opponents of capital punishment are currently making. You may also encounter a “blended” type question that asks you to evaluate whether a certain punishment is constitutional or unconstitutional based on a certain amendment. This happened in 2003 with a question pertaining to whether capital punishment should be considered cruel and unusual punishment.

If the NFL does not decide to place questions about Sonia Sotomayor’s appointment to the Supreme Court in the American Politics round, which I am about 50-50 on since they changed the wording of this topic area, they will be here. Extempers should have a file about Sotomayor’s past judicial rulings, the most notable of which is the *Ricci v. DeStefano* case currently before the Court that discusses firefighters in New Haven, Connecticut having their promotional exam scores thrown out because African-American firefighters did not qualify for a promotion through the exam. Extempers will confront questions about Sotomayor’s qualifications to be on the bench, whether Republicans should filibuster her nomination, her judicial philosophy, and how she could change the Supreme Court. Keep in mind that she is replacing David Souter, a liberal judge, so the chance to alter the balance of the court is slim, unless she turns out to be a conservative in sheep’s clothing (which is highly unlikely).

Lastly, do not forget to consider white-collar crime when doing your research. While perhaps not as high-profile as it was two or three years ago, it is certainly still an issue lurking just off the mainstream media radar. This is made even more important by the Obama administration’s decision to crack down on corporations receiving federal bailout funds and to stop people cheating on their federal taxes (although this could emerge in the Business & the Economy topic area).

### *Practice Questions*

1. How can America reduce its recidivism rates?
2. Should marijuana be legalized?
3. Are strip searches of students a violation of their Fourth amendment rights?
4. Will the GOP vote against Sotomayor?
5. Are police taser policies too lax?

### **Topic Area #9: States & Cities**

I remember when I competed in Kentucky people always asked me why I kept files for major cities such as New York and Washington D.C. and why I had files for “City Issues”, “City Economics”, “State Economies”, and “State Issues.” The answer: this round. While analyzing specific state issues or trends is unfamiliar ground to many extempers, this is nothing new at the national tournament. Between 2001-2004, the states and cities topic area appeared in elimination rounds at least three times and I have seen many a good extemper ruined by this round. However, with adequate preparation that should not happen to you.

Many questions in this round do not deal with specific areas of the country (i.e. New York City) as much as they deal with overall trends. My guess for why this topic area is coming back after being absent last year is the downturn in the economy has killed state budgets and is causing massive headaches on the state level. Also, extempers who do not have a file on California might

be shooting themselves in the foot as that state has a lot of issues to confront, especially in regards to its fiscal situation.

States, especially those who did not vote for Barack Obama, have also shown a willingness to confront his administration in regards to the stimulus bill and federal intervention in the economy. The “tea parties” that took place throughout the country earlier this year, in conjunction with state sovereignty bills, have demonstrated that the belief in federalism still has an appeal. State actions against federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind also show that states are not willing to allow the federal government to make all the policies for the country.

While it is not important to an extemper to have command over the issues impacting each of the fifty states, it is important for them to identify regional trends. The Southwestern part of the United States typically worries about illegal immigration more than the rest of the country and they are also fighting off forest fires and drought conditions. The South has conservative leanings and does not favor strong federal intervention in their lives or the economy. States like Florida and Mississippi often worry about disaster preparedness thanks to hurricanes. Furthermore, the Northeast is more open to social change and as gay marriage illustrates, is more willing to adopt controversial policies in the hopes that they may be later adopted on a national stage. Understanding these trends can be useful for speeches, especially if a question is more regional in focus.

Do not freak yourself out about this round if you know very little about the states. One strategy you can employ is that if you hit a question that has a general theme, such as crime, your files most likely have articles that pertain to that state. Sometimes *The Economist* will have articles about specific states, but they will discuss themes such as corruption or the drug war, etc. So while you may not have a file on “Mississippi” you may have articles concerning that state already in your files.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Should California get a new constitution?
2. How can Western states deal with water shortages?
3. Will state sovereignty resolutions significantly alter the balance of power in federal-state relations?
4. What is the state of the state’s economies?
5. Should gay marriage remain a state issue?

### **Topic Area #10: American: Sports, Media, and Pop Culture**

One word for this topic: yuck. Years ago the NFL extemp committee supposedly eliminated this topic area altogether. However, it is back with a vengeance and many extempers are probably hoping this pops up in prelims. After all, if a national semi-final round is featuring this topic area I find that to be shameful and ridiculous to such a degree that I may never look at U.S. extemp the same way again.

That said, this topic area will reflect on things extempers usually do not speak on (at least for the “sports” and “pop culture” topic areas). Cutting publications such as *People* and *Sports Illustrated* is not wholly unjustified here as many of those publications reflect on some of the issues you may have to discuss here such as Michael Vick, the stupidity of the BCS bowl system for college football, academic cheating scandals at major universities such as Memphis, steroids in baseball, music trends such as rap (and the epic question *Is rap crap?*), and questions about

new blockbuster movies such as Terminator: Salvation. A question about violence in movies or video games is not out of the question here either.

The media part of this question is the most substantive part of the topic area and with the economic crisis the world of print media has started to really fall apart. Questions about how print media can adapt to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and whether media is too politically biased will emerge. A question about the so-called Fairness Doctrine could also come up, especially because it has several charged political elements behind it. There is even the controversial idea of the government stepping in to bailout print media that could take shape in this round, although I see that as more economic in nature.

What makes this round tricky is the scarcity of mainstream media articles actively analyzing the media behavior. If you want to be able to speak with authority (and plentiful citations) about the decline of print media, the impact of blogs, and the biases of various news sources, you must turn to think-tanks and organizations which specialize in media meta-analysis. There are many groups (notably the Annenberg foundation) which attempt to act as media “watchdogs,” tracking perceived partiality and also recording which issues get the most play in traditional media outlets. Using studies from these groups will allow you to take a unique look at the media in this round, but will also allow you to comment on the validity of your sources when you are speaking on other topic areas as well. But be careful; many of these self-described watchdog groups are actually quite biased themselves.

It is also important to prepare by printing articles on recent cultural phenomena in America, and try to understand both the source of these fads and also their impact on Americans’ daily lives. Therefore, things such as Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter are fair game.

Many of even the most talented and experienced extempers simply dread this round or view it as beneath their intellectual capacity. Take advantage of this as an opportunity to make yourself stand out as someone who can speak confidently and intelligently by illuminating the hidden significance to these seemingly trivial issues. I recommend watching a well-known interview like Bill Moyers or Charlie Rose talk with “celebrity” guests like Chris Martin or Charlie Sheen. Try to mimic their ability to connect issues in culture and entertainment to larger more serious concepts.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Should the NBA change its age limit rule?
2. How can print media succeed in a digital age?
3. Should college football have a playoff system?
4. Can Twitter and Facebook bring people closer to their government?
5. Has baseball done enough to stop steroid abuse?

### **Topic Area #11: The New President**

This is a generic topic area that usually comes to the forefront at the beginning of a new presidential administration. As one can infer from the topic area, questions in this round will be about the Obama administration and its actions thus far. There will be many questions in this round that will ask you to evaluate Obama’s handling of the war on terrorism, his handling of American foreign policy, and the way the administration has dealt with the economic crisis. Using the resources available on the White House website can greatly assist you in this regard as

they lay out specific presidential policies and copies of the President's radio addresses to the country can be useful for quotations in your speeches.

I would recommend that extempers go to each cabinet department and print out bios for each of the cabinet secretaries. I ask that you do this because it is not unusual to see this topic area ask a question about whether certain presidential appointments were wise or what the new president could gain from those appointments.

The reason I did not mention President Bush in the American politics topic area analysis is because there could be comparison questions between the Bush White House and the Obama White House in this topic area. There have already been significant differences in how the Obama administration has preferred to handle enhanced interrogation techniques and policy in the Middle East (especially with the Israeli-Palestinian question), but there have also been similarities in regards to detaining some terror suspects without trial and in continuing with No Child Left Behind. Having a grasp on old Bush era policies and attitudes can prepare you for this round and if you do not know about them, do some independent research and have some articles on hand to discuss the Bush legacy. You may even be asked what Obama can learn from some of the Bush administration's mistakes.

You may also get questions asking you to evaluate if Obama has fulfilled campaign pledges. On some pledges, such as not taxing lower class Americans, Obama has shown a willingness to back up with a move to raise cigarette taxes. He has also not been able to forge the bipartisan attitude on Capitol Hill that he promised to do on the campaign trail so expect to be asked why that has not occurred.

Finally, a different type of question you could be asked in this round is about presidential priorities. With Obama enjoying a healthy Democratic majority in Congress he has supporters who are arguing that he push through mass social reforms dealing with immigration, the environment, and health care. However, Obama only has a certain amount of political capital so you may be asked what he should spend that capital on.

For all of these questions, make sure you have a command of Obama's background, how he has dealt with Congressional opposition to some of his plans, and the strategies he has used to engage leaders so far. Analogies from the campaign trail may not be bad either or the beginnings of past presidential administrations. Keep in mind, your judges probably either voted for or against Obama so they will either like him or not (and opinion polls do show that he is a very polarizing figure). Thus, when approaching this topic be sure to show the motivations behind Obama's policy actions and why or why he will not achieve what he wants.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Is Obama's Middle East foreign policy putting Israel at risk?
2. How well has Obama handled the economic crisis?
3. Was it a wise move for Obama to put Hillary Clinton in charge as Secretary of State?
4. What job performance grade does Obama deserve so far?
5. Has Obama changed Washington or has he let Washington change him?

### **Topic Area #12: Health and Welfare**

After being split apart last year, the good ol' "Health and Welfare" topic makes its return to the NFL national tournament. This round is an old staple of U.S. extemp and has typically dealt with government programs and social services designed to assist Americans with their well-being.

For the health side of the topic area, expect to have to do a great deal of talking about the U.S. healthcare system. Do not expect to get by simply by preparing talking points about the flaws in America's healthcare system. Certainly it is good to have access to general research about America's current healthcare spending, and her standing compared to other nations. But most topics will probably require deeper exploration.

Be prepared to discuss the specific problems which *lead to* the inadequacies in our healthcare system. Also, be sure to look at some of the healthcare reforms which are currently being proposed. Don't limit yourself to those laid out by major presidential candidates. Many other senators, think tanks, or federal commissions have put forward recommendations. You may want to identify the ones you think most highly of and be prepared to argue for them. And don't use the words "Medicare" and "Medicaid" as though they were interchangeable. Your judge is older than you and will probably notice.

Healthcare issues outside of the entitlement programs will certainly arise as well. Be prepared to speak on recent medical advances, as well as controversial programs such as stem cell research or sex education as a means of preventing the spread of HIV. Many medical organizations publish quarterly or monthly journals with excellent articles on the most recent controversies in the medical field, but be aware that some (particularly the AMA) have frequently been accused of bias.

Be warned that sometimes the NFL tournament interprets "Welfare" to mean not simply the entitlement program known as the Welfares System, but any and all government programs which promote the general welfare. This would include other anti-poverty programs, educational assistance, and disaster relief, to name a few. Therefore, government programs such as Head Start or federal efforts to still assist in New Orleans could arise.

Due to reports this year that entitlement programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security are running out of money, there will be questions about the long-term sustainability of these programs. As an extemper speaking in this round, one of your first goals must be to convince your judge of the urgency of reform measures. While significance statements are always important in extemp, I think this round lends itself to the practice most strongly. Before you finish your introduction, you should have explained to the judge why he or she should need to know the answer to your question. To this end, be sure you are familiar with the statistics projecting the future of the Social security system and the dangers it faces, as well as figures about the high annual costs of welfare programs.

There is little special preparation you can do other than to familiarize yourself with the various reforms that have been suggested for these programs recently, and to understand the arguments for and against a few of them. As with the economics round, do your best to use meaningful statistics and clearly explain the issue, but know that after hearing 6 speeches on social security your judge may be borderline comatose if you do not throw in some interesting, illustrative facts and perhaps a clever quip or two.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Have plans for privatizing Social Security been permanently shelved?

2. Should soda be taxed?
3. Can the federal government afford a universal healthcare system?
4. Would deregulation of the health insurance market significantly reduce the cost of health insurance?
5. How can Medicare remain solvent?

### **Topic Area #13: National Defense and Homeland Security**

Many of the questions in this round will likely address either the sufficiency, the efficacy, or the ethics and legality of America's most recent counterterrorism measures. To stand out among your competitors, be sure to familiarize yourself with the history of homeland security issues dating back to September 11<sup>th</sup>. The websites of the NSA and the department of Homeland security may contain some interesting internal documents that you should consider printing for your boxes, but you should focus on independently prepared documents. For example, while it may not be necessary to have the entire 9/11 commission report in your box, highlighted excerpts or an article summarizing its findings may still be useful. Although this information may seem out-of-date, many current homeland security controversies still revolve around its recommendations. Also, Obama's efforts towards ensuring cybersecurity warrant a mention here.

Many of the topics may also ask you to assess the success of various new homeland security initiatives. To do this, consider not only the history of these programs, but also the programs they replaced, if applicable. And most certainly, do not be afraid to let your answers in this round overlap into the realm of economics, or foreign policy, or even science and technology. Security issues can almost always be linked to a wide variety of other topics. As long as you stay on topic, this can be a good way to demonstrate your big-picture understanding.

There could also be questions about how the U.S. can handle Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Understanding the implications of attacks on Iran and North Korea for their work at nuclear facilities, especially in terms of a regional and international focus, is imperative for a successful speech. Extempers may also be asked whether U.S. defenses in those areas are sufficient for catastrophic scenarios. Also, questions about military strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq, moreso for Afghanistan as Obama wants to have a new "surge" there, are likely to appear here because they do not fit in the terrorism parameters set for topic area number three.

#### *Practice Questions*

1. Should the U.S. recognize North Korea as a member of the world's nuclear club?
2. Do Obama's efforts on cybersecurity go far enough?
3. Has America forgotten the lessons of 9/11?
4. Why is public support for the war in Afghanistan falling?
5. Would it be wise for the U.S. to attack Iran's nuclear facilities?