

# THE EX FILES

**Wake Forest Edition  
Volume 2, Issue No. 1**

## From the Publisher

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With the Wake Forest National Early Bird less than two weeks away, extempers across the country are preparing for the beginning of the 2009-2010 season. Last season saw California emerge as a stronger extemp power, with Bellarmine College Prep's impressive showing at NFL Nationals and saw Stacey Chen of North Allegheny Senior High School emerge as the first official Extemp Central National Points Race champion. North Allegheny Senior High School also managed to narrowly edge out Bellarmine College Prep for the National Team Points Race.

At Extemp Central, we look forward to another great season and questions have been posted on our site since the first week of August. In a similar fashion, the staff of this year's *Ex Files* looks forward to providing coverage of this year's events in the extemp community. We look forward to providing detailed coverage from the Montgomery Bell Extemp Round Robin, with pairings and results released as they happen, and the possibility exists of live coverage from the Wake Forest Early Bird, the Glenbrooks, and the Extemp Tournament of Champions as well.

This year's *Ex Files* staff is also seeing some new additions. We welcome Stacey Chen, Evan Larson (last year's NFL United States Extemp national champion), Nicholas Cugini, Gilbert Lee (2000 NFL International Extemp national champion), Austin Wright (2009 NFA extemp national champion), and Rob Warchol to the staff this year. Aside from staff turnover, there are also new features to the magazine including Editor's Corner, where I will break down trends and strategies in extemporaneous speaking, and Extemp Roundtable, where members of our staff will evaluate an extemp question that extempers could see at a local or national tournament.

In this issue, *The Ex Files* has an interview with Chen, reveals the changes in the points structure of this year's National Points Race, and provides a topic brief on the size of America's budget deficit. The staff of *The Ex Files* wishes everyone good luck who is competing at Wake Forest, Yale, St. Mark's, and at local tournaments in the weeks and months ahead. The next edition of *The Ex Files* will be released prior to the Glenbrooks tournament in early November.

-Logan Scisco



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# Editor's Corner: The Grand Slam

By Logan Scisco

Welcome to the first installment of *Editor's Corner*, which will become a regular column in *The Ex Files*. In this column, I will devote time to discuss trends in extemporaneous speaking, strategies, and issues that impact that extemporaneous speaking community at large. If extempers have any suggestions for future editions of *Editor's Corner*, please e-mail them to me at [logan.scisco@wku.edu](mailto:logan.scisco@wku.edu).

The subject of this month's column will be the "Grand Slam" of extemporaneous speaking. Chances are that there are not many people out there who know anything about a Grand Slam of extemporaneous speaking. The phrase was coined back in the 2004-2005 season, when Kevin Troy of Eagan High School in Minnesota went on the most amazing winning streak that arguably any extemporaneous speaker has ever had. Troy, who had captured the 2003 NFL United States Extemporaneous Speaking title in his sophomore year, tore through the national circuit his senior season and won four notable tournaments: the Montgomery Bell Extemporaneous Speaking Round Robin, the Extemporaneous Speaking Tournament of Champions, the Catholic Forensic League national championship, and the National Forensic League International Extemp championship. The victories at the TOC and at NFL were also highly significant. In the case of the TOC, Troy successfully defended his championship and is the only person to ever win the event twice. The NFL victory was also historically significant because it was the first, and only time since, that an extemporaneous speaker has captured both the United States and International championships in their career. Shortly after Troy's victory at NFL, the [victorybriefs.net](http://victorybriefs.net) website declared that Troy had achieved a "Grand Slam" during the season.

Some sports, notably golf and tennis, have major tournaments. In the case of the PGA Tour golf circuit and the WTA and WTP tennis circuits there are four tournaments each season that are considered more important than the others. This special designation makes them "major" championships and some of the greatest who have played those sports have preserved their legacy by winning those championships. Without a major, you are seen as someone who is lacking something significant, something that makes you stand out from among the rest.

So the question becomes, does extemp have major championships? Better yet, does it have a clear four major championships to make up a Grand Slam?

In answering these questions, I think that it is obvious that there are major championships for extemporaneous speakers and I also believe that the four tournaments Troy won in 2005 can count as a Grand Slam. The most notable is the NFL national tournament. Qualifying to the national tournament is an honor, but making it to the final round, where a competitor endures the stress of giving a seven minute speech in a large setting and that is filmed for all-time is a setting unlike any other. Couple this with nice trophies, a special national recognition for the winner of those final rounds, and \$6,000 in scholarship money awarded to the winner and you have a recipe for arguably the most prestigious forensic event in the country.

Of course, there is also the Montgomery Bell Extemp Round Robin in Nashville, Tennessee each January, which invites the top sixteen extemp competitors from across the country to bash heads over ten rounds of competition prior to a special Exhibition Round. The accolades that come with being selected and the high quality of judging at the tournament make it a unique experience. A listing of distinguished champions in the past also adds prestige to the event.

Finally, there is the Catholic Forensic League national tournament and the Extemp TOC, both of which occur in May. The main criticism in extemp circles of the CFL national tournament is that its judging is

not of the highest quality and the tournament tends to favor delivery over analysis. Another criticism is that the tournament does not attract as high a quality of field as senior competitors have chosen to not attend to the tournament due to graduation or other prior commitments. Also, some states, especially in the West and Southwest, do not attend the CFL tournament as much as other regions, which knocks down its prestige. For the Extemp TOC, the tournament has had fluctuating participation over the years. Nevertheless, putting aside last year's level of participation, the tournament was growing and its 2008 field attracted a healthy level of competition. In fact, the 2009 version's top four featured the MBA champion, the MBA Exhibition Round champion, the eventual NFL IX champion and final round champion, and an NFL USX semi-finalist, not too shabby a list considering that outside of those accomplishments those four individuals would eventually win seven of the tournaments in the National Points Race. However, the Extemp TOC could still see wider participation to make the tournament stronger because in its current incarnation it is more like golf's PGA Championship: a nice tournament but not of the same degree of recognition as the other major tournaments.

The larger implications of if we recognize that there is a Grand Slam in extemporaneous speaking is that we could have a better measure of ranking the best competitors since 2003, when the first Extemp TOC was held. Based on their number of major championships, we could have a better way of resolving some of the arguments of who the greatest extempers are. This recognition could also give goals to aspiring extempers, who wish to win the "career" Grand Slam in extemporaneous speaking, something that only Troy has ever managed to accomplish.

To illustrate who are the major championship winners under this system, I thought I would go back and tally up victories for competitors in these four tournaments since 2003 and rank them below, with a notation made for each of their victories.

**6:**

Kevin Troy—Eagan High School, Minnesota ('03 NFL USX, '04 TOC, '05 MBA, '05 TOC, '05 CFL, '05 NFL IX)

**3:**

Alex Stephenson—Eagan High School, Minnesota ('06 MBA, '07 TOC, '07 NFL USX)

**2:**

Stacey Chen—North Allegheny Senior High School, Pennsylvania ('09 TOC, '09 NFL IX)

Becca Goldstein—Newton South High School, Massachusetts ('08 MBA, '08 NFL USX)

James Hohmann—Eastview High School, Minnesota ('04 NFL USX, '05 NFL USX)

Akshar Rambachan—Eastview High School, Minnesota ('08 CFL, '08 NFL IX)

**1:**

Matt Arons—Millburn High School, New Jersey ('09 MBA)

Reid Bagwell—Scarsdale High School, New York ('08 TOC)

Josh Bone—Milton Academy, Massachusetts ('04 MBA)

Tex Dawson—Plano West High School, Texas ('07 MBA)

Alex Draime—Howland High School, Ohio ('09 CFL)

Dan Hemel—Scarsdale High School, New York ('03 NFL IX)

Jack Hsiao—Lamar Consolidated High School, Texas ('03 TOC)

David Kumbroch—Collierville High School, Tennessee ('07 NFL IX)

Evan Larson—Bellarmine College Prep ('09 NFL USX)

Courtney Otto—Kentucky Country Day, Kentucky ('04 CFL)

Ishanaa Rambachan—Eastview High School, Minnesota ('04 NFL IX)

Akshar Rao—Leland High School, California ('07 CFL)

Dan Rauch—Millburn High School, Massachusetts ('06 TOC)  
Spencer Rockwell—Palisade High School, Colorado ('06 NFL IX)  
David Tannenwald—Newton South High School, Massachusetts ('03 MBA)  
Gautam Thapar—Leland High School, California ('06 CFL)  
Greg Wagman—Dallastown Area High School, Pennsylvania ('03 CFL)  
Colin West—Rocky Mountain High School, Colorado ('06 NFL USX)

From this list, we can see that no one will probably catch Kevin Troy's mark in the near future. To do so would be to put together either an amazing run like what he did his senior season in 2005 or to have two dominant years. With more programs competing in forensics today and with many students not achieving a high level of success until late in their junior or senior seasons, winning just one major championship is an amazing accomplishment, let alone multiple ones. What also stands out from the standings above is that Eagan High School in Minnesota has the top two finishers and the state of Minnesota has four of the top six major championship winners, with Eagan having nine majors and Eastview having four, all of which are national championships, an amazing feat.

In closing, you may not believe in a Grand Slam for extemporaneous speaking. You may believe there could be a Grand Slam but tournaments like Harvard or Glenbrooks need to be considered prior to creating a framework to evaluate the best competitors. Such criticisms are valid and debates such as that is what makes the event exciting. However, visualizing major extemp events like major championships, each with their unique formats, fields, and obstacles, does make the season more interesting and can provide a way to measure extempers against each other long after they have left the prep room.

# Catching the Worm at the Wake Forest National Earlybird

By Max Webster<sup>1</sup>

After a summer of camps, workshops, practice speeches, and filing, it's finally time to shake off the rust, hop back into your suit, and begin the '09/'10 season with the first tournament of the year: The Wake Forest National Earlybird. Wake was always my first tournament every year, and I can honestly say that it was one of my favorites. It's well run, competitive, and located in a great college town. But like any tournament, there is much to Wake beneath the surface, which years of attendance and talking to former competitors will help you to uncover. I hope to provide some of that insight for you. I will share some of the quirks, secrets, and tricks of the tournament that I learned during my years at the Earlybird to help you maximize your potential for success and get the most out of what should be an enjoyable event for everyone. Many of the strategies and concepts I will discuss are also applicable to just about any tournament you attend, so you can use this article as a guide to aid in your preparations for other upcoming competitions as well.

The most important aspect of any tournament is your pre-tournament preparation. The weeks before a tournament that you spend getting your files in order and doing practice rounds with teammates or coaches are the best indicator of what kind of a tournament you'll have. I truly believe that practice makes perfect and the work you put into extemp well before it's show-time will pay off in big rounds when you can tackle an obscure question with ease or put a thoughtful and unique spin on a more commonplace question that will keep your judges attention throughout the round and land you the one. This mantra of hard work and preparation is particularly applicable to Wake Forest. During the much-needed summer respite from school, there is usually no coach or judicious teammate pressuring you to file and speak. But if you have been doing that work on your own, then it will certainly show at this tournament more than any other where you will have a huge leg-up on your competition.

Even if you haven't had time to work a tremendous amount on extemp over the summer – don't panic. You still have two weeks to put your preparation into over-drive.

There are two main areas of focus you should have between now and September 11. The first is making sure you have thorough and well-researched files on all of the recent hot button issues. Although the questions at Wake are authored by the same person who writes for other major tournaments including St. Marks and The Glenbrooks, the questions never seem to be quite as obscure or difficult here. Take

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<sup>1</sup> Max Webster graduated from Montgomery Bell Academy in 2008. During his extemp career Max won the 2007 Wake Forest National Early Bird, was the runner-up at the 2008 MBA Round Robin (where he was a two-time competitor), was the runner-up at the 2007 Glenbrooks, collected four top-three finishes at the St. Marks Heart of Texas Invitational between 2006 and 2007, and was a finalist at the 2006 Barkley Forum at Emory University. He is currently a student at Yale University majoring in political science and competes for Yale's debate team, the most decorated collegiate debate team in the country. His interests include sustainable development, politics, his pet dachshund, and college basketball.

advantage of that and make sure that your files on issues like healthcare reform and the Iranian protests are perfect. The second area of focus is on practice speeches. The topics you speak on don't matter as much as making your speeches simulate a real round. Get a friend to watch. Treat him like a real judge: walk into the room, hand him your question, ask for appropriate time signals, and deliver your speech as you would at a tournament. Going through these motions will give you a critical advantage in the prelims of Wake, when most people will be freaking out and stumbling over themselves as they deliver their first speech in months. Don't let that person be you. Your goal is to appear in mid-season form by round one.

Now that we have addressed pre-tournament preparation, the next important area of focus should be on specific tournament planning. Before you arrive, make sure you know the schedule of rounds, meal breaks, etc. Unlike most tournaments, Wake spans three days and two locations. You will have one prelim Friday night and three on Saturday, followed by semifinals on Saturday evening and a final round on Sunday morning. Prelims and semifinals will both be held at North Forsyth High School, while the final round will be in a large lecture room on Wake Forest's campus. Once you get to the tournament, you should plan how and where you plan to prep. Prep is held in North Forsyth's auditorium (except for finals, where prep is held in a Wake classroom) with plenty of seating and pacing space, but little to no writing space. Figure out whichever way is best for you to adapt to these circumstances before your first round. I would store files in chairs, grab pertinent documents, outline on the floor, and pace in the side or back of the auditorium until it was time to leave for my round. Although it may not seem like a big deal now, prepping efficiently is key to easing your nerves and building your confidence before your first few rounds.

Now, to address rounds. My experience with Wake has been that the judging tends to be heavier on the presentation side, with some obvious exceptions. This is largely because, although Wake holds a concurrent esteemed debate tournament in LD and Policy, almost all of those judges are at a different site. So your judging pool will mostly be all of the other IE judges. Now this is not to say that you should try and become overly theatrical and skirt on your analysis, because your judges will be smart and capable of following good, logical arguments. It does mean, however, that you should put extra effort and focus into being personable and confident during rounds. Let's take a look at one place where this tip can functionally be applied: introductions and conclusions.

Make sure your introductions and conclusions are silky smooth and flawless, as this is where performance focused judges often distinguish their ones from their threes. This is NOT to say you should be rehearsing intros that are superfluously cute and witty and can be linked to any question ahead of time, as I am not a proponent of "canning." Aside from the questions of integrity, I think that the major reason not to do so is because it will hurt you in the long run. Canning makes you seem more like a salesman than an extemper and ANY judge, whether flow heavy or not, can spot a gimmicky performance from a mile away. Appearing too slick and marginally topical out of the gates will kill your legitimacy with the judge from the start, making it unlikely that he will take the rest of your speech and analysis (even if it is killer) seriously. But I digress. Focusing on intros means that you should allocate enough of your prep time to practice your intros all the way through enough times to clear any blemishes or mistakes so that the first minute and a half of your speech is smooth and natural. Focusing



on conclusions means that you should have some idea of a concise and clever sentence or two to end your speech so that you don't ramble to a halt. Confidence and cool in the beginning and end of a speech can literally make or break any round, but is especially important with judges who aren't super fixated on the flow.

We've now covered how to handle The Wake Forest National Earlybird from pre-season through round, but my last piece of advice is by far the most important: have fun! Being a year removed from extemp, I've got to tell you that I don't remember my exact ranks at Wake, my judge critiques, or even what my final round question was. What I do remember is what a great time I had with some of my best friends in high school, both from MBA and all over the country. I remember late night runs to IHOP with my teammates, hitting up local Winston-Salem burger joints with a couple of my close buds from Pittsburgh, introducing myself to countless new friends in the cafeteria during the never-ending dead periods between rounds, and, of course, the all-night drives back to Nashville arriving with only a few hours to spare before my school-week began on Monday morning. I remember the weeks of printing, filing, highlighting, and speaking I did in the run-up to Wake, the excitement I would get when I grabbed a question that was especially thought provoking or unusual, and the satisfaction I had in knowing that I had done everything possible to do my best at the tournament. These memories are what extemp is really about - the research and presentation skills that will carry you wherever your college or career aspirations take you, the relationships you forge that can last a lifetime, and, most importantly, the fun you have in taking a reprieve from high school to do something that you genuinely enjoy. Think about how many of your friends would love the opportunity to skip school on Friday and hang out on a college campus for the weekend while enjoying a community of intellectually curious and vibrant peers from all over. So before you get too caught up in whatever competitive goals you have for this tournament, or any other for that matter, take a deep breath, relax, and enjoy yourself! You're lucky to do an activity as awesome as extemp. Best of luck to you all at Wake Forest!

# National Points Race Champion Interview with Stacey Chen

By Logan Scisco

*Last year was the first official year of the Extemp Central National Points Race and Stacey Chen of North Allegheny Senior High School in Wexford, Pennsylvania emerged victorious by a wide margin over the rest of her competitors. Chen's season saw her win the Glenbrooks, the Harvard Invitational, the Extemp TOC, and arguably her biggest title of the year, the International Extemp national championship at NFL Nationals. She also managed to win the final round national championship, and the tournament, by one rank over Will Rafey of Bellarmine College Prep in California enabling her to capture the National Teams Points Race trophy for her team as well.*

*Stacey has agreed to become a writer for the Ex Files this season and as her first assignment, she decided to sit down and discuss her goals, accomplishments she earned last season, and offer advice to extempers who would one day like to achieve her level of success.*

**Logan Scisco:** Thanks for deciding to sit down and share your thoughts with the extemp community Stacey and congratulations on being last year's first Extemp Central National Points Race champion.

**Stacey Chen:** You're welcome! Thanks for the opportunity to share with the extemp community... I apologize in advance for rambling.

**Scisco:** That should be okay, more is better than less with these interviews. Tell us how you got started with extemporaneous speaking.

**Chen:** I actually joined forensics accidentally; in my freshman year, my friend heard about the intro meeting and needed help finding the library, so I went with her. Extemp sounded new and fun, the team members at the time seemed like interesting people, and I enjoyed giving presentations, or just talking too much, so I decided to give it a shot. I ended up staying because I loved the team and my coach. Extemp itself was okay too, I guess!

**Scisco:** When did you recognize that you had some talent in extemporaneous speaking and that it was "your" event?

**Chen:** Well, I started out in extemp and didn't try another event besides Congress, which every member of my team does, until my senior year when I dabbled in public forum. I was only on the team the first half of my freshman year during which time I went to practice a couple times each week and competed regularly at locals, but I never had success; I just enjoyed learning about current events and being on the team. I rejoined the team the beginning of sophomore year and really started working hard, so I did okay at locals. Then my teammates decided to go to Harvard to check out a national tournament for the first time, and I figured I'd go to get some experience and watch a ton of outrounds. Well, Harvard '07 was definitely an adventure... I got crazy lucky but, predictably and deservedly, crashed and burned at the end, yet for whatever reason (alright, I was hooked), after I finished crying and having a seizure, I decided to keep traveling nationally with my teammate Jack to see where it went.

**Scisco:** Is there anyone you looked up to as you were competing? If so, who was it and why?

**Chen:** There are SO many people I admired as both extempers and friends – there's absolutely no way I could list them all here! But the first and most obvious one was my teammate, Jack Grennan. He really

gave me a solid foundation in extemp and continued teaching me and serving as an example and resource until he graduated after my junior year; I have to thank him for putting up with me for so long! Otherwise, I have tremendous respect for all the other members of my GMIF '07 lab (Billy Strong, Hunter Kendrick, Max Webster, Preeti Willemann, Madison Grinnell) for being a wonderful support group to learn with. And finally, I have mad respect and love for Becca Goldstein, who totally repped the girls and was one of the best examples of an amazing, inspiring competitor who was always friendly, hilarious, and willing to give advice.

**Scisco:** Is there anyone you modeled your style after? If so, who?

**Chen:** I don't think I really ever modeled my style after a particular person or strategy. People would tell me I had a certain problem, and I'd try to fix it. I did love watching other extempers and trying to figure out what I liked about them though –Becca, for example, showed me that you have to be assertive and confident yet relatable and have fun at the same time. It's natural to pick things up from watching people frequently, whether they're teammates like Jack or other national competitors like Becca. In the end though, I strongly believe that extemp is really just explaining your thoughts to an audience, so the best style is always your own conversational voice, whether it includes things like humor and sarcasm, which I love, or not.

**Scisco:** Which person would you say had the biggest impact on your extemp career? Why?

**Chen:** Ouch, it's pretty impossible to pick one person in the forensics world. Obviously Jack is way up there for being a great teacher and extemp role model without ever seeming like a competitor against me. Also, all of my instructors at GMIF were incredible and inspirational, particularly my lab leader Adam Johnson and the extemp director Jason Warren (they're beyond wonderful!), who permanently shaped my understanding of extemp... and definitely my coach, Sharon Volpe, for always supporting me and being the ridiculously awesome person that she is.

**Scisco:** Prior to your senior year, you had been a CFL finalist. What steps did you take in the off-season that made you such a dominant competitor last year?

**Chen:** Hmm I just kinda kept plodding along – reading, printing, and filing. I didn't get the chance to return to GMIF, so I did my usual thing. Practices for me were mostly about working on the tubs and helping novices instead of giving practice speeches. I like to think of extemp as a really good time, so I only worked hard and waited to see where it would take me! I was really, really blessed my senior year, and I'm tremendously thankful that my extemp journey took the path it did.

**Scisco:** Did you feel any pressure going into NFL as the #1 ranked competitor in the national points race?

**Chen:** Sure, there's always pressure, but there are different kinds of pressure. The first is outside pressure – it's definitely hard to not let it get to your head and freak you out when your coach, team, and friends have high expectations, but at the same time, you have to maintain perspective. The most pressure I think came from myself – I wanted to do as well as possible, but I absolutely didn't expect anything. Every tournament is different, and you never know what's going to happen. The main thing to remember is not to let nerves and competition overwhelm you – I wanted to remember NFL as a time to savor my

last extemp competition and reunite with some of my best friends, not as an intensely stressful week of rounds and breaks.

**Scisco:** Were you satisfied with your final round speech @ NFL? Why or why not?

**Chen:** I was actually really happy with my final round speech, which is weird because I usually focus on the flaws in my speeches. I think the special thing about NFL finals for me was that I knew it was my last tournament and my last speech... a last hurrah. Before the round, I thought a lot about why I did extemp and recognized that I was in it almost completely for the people and the experience, so I didn't want to blow my last speech by focusing on the big stage and the judges and the results. I was almost surprisingly comfortable walking out onto the stage because of all the tournaments I'd been at before and all the speeches I'd given in the past, so I just went and gave a fun speech! I'm sure there was plenty to pick apart, and I probably would remember a lot more of those aspects if I were still competing, but as it is, I was just really honored and happy to have the chance to speak one last time in such a wonderful venue with all my teammates and friends watching. Going back and analyzing the speech would only ruin a happy ending!

**Scisco:** Out of all your victories last season, which do you think was the most important to you and why?

**Chen:** Haha that's a really hard question! I'd obviously like to say NFL just because it was my last tournament, and I think to some extent that's true. But each tournament has some special significance to me – Yale was awesome just because I love the people and place, Glenbrooks was cool because my mom was with me, GMU was like returning home, Harvard felt full circle after 3 years and it being my first tournament, etc. I don't think I can pick one because all of them were an integral part of my extemp experience, and I wouldn't like to forget any of the good times that came with each of them. Victory at a particular tournament shouldn't be a goal – it's just another step in the extemp learning experience.

**Scisco:** What advice would you have to other extempers who want to achieve your level of success?

**Chen:** Two things: work hard and have fun!!! First, unlike what many people would like to believe (I was included in this category as a newcomer haha), extemp is not an easy event just because you don't have to write cases and memorizes speeches in advance. There's a lot of depth to the event, a ton of different strategical approaches, and a massive workload in terms of preparation. Reach out, explore, ask questions, seek help, teach others, and most importantly, find out what works for YOU as an individual. There's no formula for a successful extemper: what works best is simply being yourself and having a combination of solid analysis and memorable personality. Second, remember why you do extemp. It can't be about winning tournaments or putting it on your college resume. Your motive really HAS to be a true love for the material, event, and people. Remembering that you're having fun is the best way to relieve pressure and nerves while allowing your personality to shine through in speeches. You can tell when someone's just up there sharing ideas because they want to, and those are the people you enjoy listening to.

**Scisco:** What made you decide to join the staff of *The Ex Files* this year?

**Chen:** Umm I like extemp a lot. Haha what an understatement there. It's still really surreal being "done" with my extemp career... I don't think it's even quite sunk in yet. But there are innumerable people who

have made a difference in my life through forensics, and I feel so much gratitude to the extemp community in return. Extemp is about learning about the world, but at the same time and on a much deeper level, it's about learning about yourself as a person. I don't think I could possibly sound any cheesier! But it's really true. I love being available as a resource to other extempers going through the same experiences I did, and I want to maintain a connection to a world filled with people I love and admire because those are the people who shaped my high school world and accepted me for who I am while teaching me so much about myself. Oh wow, that was a ridiculous teary-eyed, nostalgia-filled, enormous run-on sentence!

**Scisco:** Thanks again for being willing to do this interview with us Stacey.

**Chen:** Again, thank you Logan for the chance to help out with *the Ex Files*! You're fabulous.

# Extemp Roundtable

with Nicholas Cugini, Mark Royce, Logan Scisco, Rob Warchol

Extemp Roundtable is a new addition to *The Ex Files* for this season. In this column a panel of recognized extempers will examine a question that could come up in a future round and they will reveal their feelings and how they would tackle the question if it was posed to them in a round.

This issues panel is made up of the following individuals:

*Nicholas Cugini placed third in United States Extemp at the 2009 NFL National tournament. Last season, we was also the winner of United States Extemp at the St. Mark's Heart of Texas Invitational and was a finalist at the MBA Round Robin and the International Extemp tournament at St. Mark's. He attended Cypress Ridge High School in Texas and was coached by Scott Baker. In the fall, Nicholas will attend Yale University.*

*Mark Royce was the runner-up in International Extemp in 2002. He coached at Montgomery Bell Academy, and is now a Ph.D. candidate in political science at George Mason University.*

*Logan Scisco was the national final round champion of United States Extemp at the 2003 NFL National tournament. He was a four-time national finalist in extemp while competing for Danville High School in Kentucky and for Western Kentucky University. He currently coaches for Boone County High School in Kentucky and for Western Kentucky University, where he is pursuing a masters degree in history.*

*Rob Warchol competed for Cardinal Mooney High School in Youngtown, Ohio. With the help of Karen Wright, he was a 3 time state qualifier, and a 2 time national qualifier in United States Extemp. He placed 7th at the 2009 NFCL National Tournament and 8th at the 2009 NFL National Tournament. Rob is continuing his extemp career under Jason Warren at George Mason University, where he plans on majoring in Government and International Politics, with an aspiration of law school.*

**PANEL QUESTION: *Is Obama's healthcare plan feasible?***

## ***Cugini:***

The healthcare debate is one of the most talked about and stigmatizing issues in America today. Because of this, it is likely that your judges will have already have an opinion on the subject, and thus it will be your job to effectively communicate your position without coming off as abrasive or unfounded. A great way to circumvent this (and effectively answer the question) is to dedicate some time to questionnaire analysis in your intro. So, if I were to draw the sample question "Is Obama's healthcare plan feasible?", the first thing I would do is define the subjective word in the question, "feasible." What does it mean for it to be feasible? Is it discussing the short term or the long term? These type of questions will help you center your answer around a cohesive thought. As long as you clearly define what question you're going to answer, answering the actual question becomes a lot easier, and less abrasive to a judge who may not agree with you (because you now have a standard to answer). It's even possible to say that it's feasible without actually endorsing the plan. The best way to make sure your speech is cohesive in this respect is to, at the end of each your points, wrap it up by connecting it back to your question definition, and point out how you achieve that definition.

As for the issue itself, I would probably go about separating the debate rhetoric from the facts. The debate portrays Obama's plan as a sweeping socialist reform that changes the face of the American economy and our values. While it is significant, it's not a complete overhaul; it is the creation of a public insurance company that is meant to compete with the existing private sector. I would mention the private market benefits of the plan, that it is essentially an expansionary fiscal policy that pumps money into the economy through benefits, allowing the uninsured to spend more money elsewhere, as well as stemming increasing healthcare costs. The status quo of employer based care is obviously unsustainable with premiums significantly rising every year. And of course, the biggest issue of feasibility is the budget deficit. Here, you could mention the flexibility of public spending versus the immediate negative consequences of increasing private sector costs. On the flip side of the issue, you could debate the effectiveness of the plan, as it is going to be very hard for the private companies to compete with the government. Also, the plan will effectively increase taxes on the rich by capping deductions. In a time where charitable giving is already very low, there is plenty of analysis available to dispute the private sector benefits. There are a lot of ways to analyze the plan, but the most important thing is to frame your answer around a specific question definition. You will be able to make your speech much less stigmatizing, and you can answer it more cohesively and effectively.

***Royce:***

Given what I perceive to be the mysterious and opaque nature of his plans, and my difficulty in arriving at a suitable meaning of "feasible," I incline toward a pessimistic view.

Although generally conservative in these matters, I have no preëxisting ideological objection to nationalized medicine; but I do protest the President's quixotic rhetoric and lack of candor. He talks vaguely of extending health insurance to tens of millions while simultaneously reducing the burden on the taxpayer, a feat which, while not perhaps impossible, would surely require the utmost in mathematical, not to speak of political brilliance. But our head of state, for all his personal charisma and oratorical might, has yet to deliver his plan to the public in a succinct, transparent, and reasonably intelligible form; and while reactionary demagoguery hardly contributes to a thoughtful discussion of a complicated subject, Obama is to blame for not dominating it from the outset.

At a more transcendent level, the halls of Congress are a poor place to look for the key to the health of our nation, which is dependent, more than anything, upon our lifestyle choices. Any honest physician, when asked what measures are most certain to extend life, will immediately indict soft drinks, red meat, candy, and cigarettes, and recommend fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and perhaps unhurried consumption of red wine. Our designs for living are also seriously at fault: whereas the Europeans have ever resided in stable, highly manicured communities in which everything is accessible on foot, we throw up treeless subdivisions and force ourselves to drive between each stop. We must bring to a halt our over-developed, dehumanized existence, and reconnect with the aesthetic of the harvest, the affection of community, and the passing of the seasons. If indeed health, and life, and peace are to be secured amid the convulsions of the elements and the passions of our fellow-creatures, they shall be found within the individual and the society, not so much the state.

***Scisco:***

As of this writing, the number given for uninsured Americans is 46 million and extempers would be wise to commit that number to memory as it is the prime rallying call behind the Democrat's healthcare initiative. However, while this 46 million figure is large, one needs to take into consideration that some estimates do not put it this large. An estimated twelve million of this figure are said to be illegal

immigrants, another ten million are estimated to be Americans who currently qualify for needs-based healthcare such as Medicaid but do not apply for it, and there are also Americans who are looking for new jobs or younger Americans who do not purchase healthcare coverage. What all of this reveals, is that the number of permanently uninsured Americans might be around eight to nine million. This is still a large figure, but it does call into question how much America actually needs to spend to provide health insurance for everyone.

Although some conservative commentators have said that the revolt that we see in town halls against this healthcare bill will spark another Republican Revolution ala 1994, that is still too early to say. Without question, Republicans are gaining in the polls versus Democrats on the issue as elderly Americans do not believe this healthcare bill will be good for them, the public is angry that members of Congress are exempt from this healthcare bill's requirements, and the public is skeptical of how much this is going to cost. The Republicans could regain some of their fiscal credentials in light of this bill, as the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has estimated that if the House bill on healthcare reform passes it will add \$239 billion to the deficit over ten years and grow significantly after that.

When looking at this question, it is important to note that Obama's aims on healthcare are not really clear. Unlike the Clinton administration, Obama outsourced the writing of this bill to Congress and did not lay down exact parameters of what he wanted. As a result, there has been confusion over what healthcare reform is going to entail as there are four Senate bills on healthcare reform and one House bill, which *The Economist* has summarized as an absolute mess and includes a public option that may not be passed in the Senate, despite the Democrats having sixty seats (or fifty-nine if you count on Massachusetts not having a quick replacement after Ted Kennedy's death). Obama has taken to the road in Montana, New Hampshire, and Colorado to sell the healthcare bill, but since he has sent mixed signals on the public option and what he wants the medical system to achieve, it is very hard to quantify what he considers to be healthcare reform.

Extempers in a speech like this would be wise to zone in on cost over other elements. Medical costs are rising because there are uninsured Americans and small risk pools for insurance companies, but larger portions of medical costs are due to the American population ageing. Old people require more medical care and this situation will only get worse over time as the baby boom generation retires. Medical inflation rates over the last five years are calculated to be as high as twenty percent. Yet economists speculate that the current versions of healthcare reform do very little to actually control cost. Reform measures such as tort reform, which would limit punitive damages in medical lawsuits, are not in the House bill. Obama wants digitized medical records, but their long-term savings are said to be dubious. There are sufficient fears of rationing if there is a public option and it forces insurance companies out of business and these fears are justified. Medicare, the biggest single payer system in the entire world for health costs, currently denies ten percent of all claims by elderly Americans. However, incentives do need to exist for smarter treatments. A counter-proposal to the Obama plan is to give Americans the ability to deduct from their taxes the cost of insurance and to allow insurance companies to compete across state lines. This would enable people to purchase catastrophic health insurance plans that are not available in every state.

Overall, it is tough to summarize the healthcare debate in a short amount of paragraphs. Yet it is hard to see how Obama's current medical plan is feasible due to its cost, due to its lack of firm aims, and possible political fallout. Nearly a quarter of Americans see the budget deficit as a major issue facing the country and while Americans favor giving insurance to those who do not have it, they do not want to lose their own insurance packages. Also, extempers should keep in mind that Obama has staked a lot on getting healthcare reform and if he fails it would be a significant black eye on his administration, probably moreso among his liberal base than with the public at large.



***Warchol:***

With the media channels virtually covering every aspect of President Obama's health-care bill, it is highly likely that the topic of Barack Obama's health-care plan will be included in the extemper community this upcoming season. Whether the bill is passed before the beginning of the season is irrelevant. An experienced extemper should be well versed on the plan, the repercussions it holds for the United States and the health-care system, and more importantly, whether it's feasible.

If we look at the question posed as to whether or not Obama's health-care plan is feasible, a couple of thoughts come into my head. I would imagine that you have two options on the answer to this question. The answer to the question would be as to how you interpret the question itself. Is it feasible in the sense of the political world (getting it passed into law), or is it feasible in the sense of our nation's economy (funding the project). Personally, I would answer this question yes on both aspects afore mentioned; however, the route I would take would be the economic option. On the belief that the federal government would be able to fund the trillion dollar project.

During this year's NFL national tournament, I drew a question similar to this discussion topic. Evidence to support this answer can be found from various sources. The majority of my speech content was from the health-care think tank of the Kaiser Family Foundation. My analysis was spun around the basis of a policy brief that writes on how subsidies from expanded programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP would provide for some of this project's funding. In addition, mentioning how Medicaid and Medicare need to be reformed would also be another aspect showing that the government has the capability to fund the project. Finally, to step outside of the health spectrum, I included the positive aspects of installing a cap and trade system in the United States. You would be essentially killing a bird with two stones. The first being a cure to the emissions crisis, and the second, and most important, the revenue generated from the program could be contributed to the funding of this project.

Whether you like the system or not, it would prove extremely beneficial for an extemper to read as much as they can on this topic because as it was this year, you can expect it to be in the break and final rounds.

# 2009-2010 Extemp Central National Points Race

By Logan Scisco

Last month, Extemp Central gradually revealed the tournaments that would make up this year's National Points Race. The only shakeup for tournaments was the decision to exclude the University of Pennsylvania's Liberty Bell Classic from the National Points Race this season. The reasoning behind this was that the Liberty Bell Classic will run opposite of the California Invitational at Berkeley and the Harvard Invitational this season so its level of participation is in question.

Extempers also noticed when the tournaments were rolled out that the tier structure has been changed. Unlike last year, which featured only three tiers of tournaments, this year's National Points Race will feature five tiers of competition. One of the criticisms that was mentioned about last year's National Points Race are that smaller, more regional tournaments like the Wake Forest National Early Bird, the St. Mark's Heart of Texas Invitational, and the California Invitational were worth the same amount of points as larger, more recognized tournaments like the Glenbrooks and Harvard. To reward extempers for their performance among larger fields, the tiers have been expanded so that the National Points Race can recognize the nation's best extemper across a broad field of tournaments.

Last year was the first official year of the National Points Race, with Stacey Chen of North Allegheny Senior High School in Pennsylvania claiming the individual championship and claiming the National Team Points Race championship for her school. A picture of the trophies can be found at this website. If you count Becca Goldstein's unofficial victory in 2008, when the points were used to give a snapshot of how the 2007-2008 season would have worked out, women have won the last two National Points Race titles. So this year will be interesting to see if any male extempers step up and wrest away the championship.

The only question that was not answered from last month's rollout of the tournaments is how many points they were going to be worth. This is the question that this article will answer. The points system is set up to reward victories at major events, but also to reward top three finishes. During the season, even if there are defects, the points scale will not be changed. This is meant to provide fairness and uniformity to the season's rankings. By the next edition of *The Ex Files*, which will be released prior to the Glenbrooks, three tournaments in the National Points Race will have been completed. Come back to Extemp Central after the Wake Forest National Early Bird, the Yale University Invitational, and St. Mark's to find out what is going on in the National Points Race standings.

## *First Tier: NFL Nationals*

This year, there is only one tournament that occupies the first tier in the standings: the National Forensic League national tournament that will be held in Kansas City, Missouri. Last year, both the Catholic Forensic League national tournament and NFL nationals shared the first tier. However, after considering that the NFL national tournament offers a bigger test of competition, has a much more grueling schedule, and has much more prestige in the extemp community, the decision was made by the points race committee to make it the sole tournament in the first tier.

As was the case last year, extempers will earn 25 bonus points if they manage to win the final round national championship in United States or International extemp. This could make the difference if two extempers who are neck-and-neck in the standings both make finals.

One major difference for how NFL nationals will be scored over last year is that instead of giving each semi-finalist in United States and International extemp 25 points, extempers will earn points based on

their placing from seventh to fourteenth. This decision was made because NFL does recognize placing in semi-finals, unlike CFL, and because extempers have had to compete for twelve rounds prior to the vicious cut prior to the final round.

Here is a breakdown of the points that will be offered to competitors for NFL Nationals:

<b><i>Ranking</i></b>	<b><i>Points Earned</i></b>
1st	200
2 <sup>nd</sup>	175
3 <sup>rd</sup>	150
4 <sup>th</sup>	110
5 <sup>th</sup>	90
6 <sup>th</sup>	75
7 <sup>th</sup>	60
8 <sup>th</sup>	55
9 <sup>th</sup>	50
10 <sup>th</sup>	45
11 <sup>th</sup>	40
12 <sup>th</sup>	35
13 <sup>th</sup>	30
14 <sup>th</sup>	25
Final Round Winner	25

*\*Italics denote semi-final placings*

*Second Tier: The Montgomery Bell Academy Extemp Round Robin*

Due to its unique format and high quality of competition, the Montgomery Bell Extemp Round Robin in Nashville, Tennessee was selected as a second tier tournament. Although the tournament is more selective than any other tournament on the year's calendar, no one can dispute the quality of its champions or of the level of competition that exists there. Also, the prestige level this tournament carries in the extemp community puts it above CFL nationals and the Extemp TOC, both of which are in the third tier this year.

The big change this year to the points awarded for the Round Robin is that the sixth place finisher will also receive points, although they will receive over ten points less than the fifth place finisher. The reasoning for this is because MBA does recognize the sixth place finisher at their awards ceremony and as such, it is only fair to reward that extemper for achieving that placing even if they do not make the Exhibition Round.

The decision was also made to award no points to the Exhibition Round winner of the tournament because the competitors who do not make the Exhibition Round judge it and that can cause a small disparity in the standings, when all of the other tournaments use non-students as judges.

Here are the points awarded for the MBA Extemp Round Robin:

<b><i>Ranking</i></b>	<b><i>Points Earned</i></b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	150
2 <sup>nd</sup>	125
3 <sup>rd</sup>	100

4 <sup>th</sup>	70
5 <sup>th</sup>	61
6 <sup>th</sup>	50

*Third Tier: CFL Nationals, the Extemp Tournament of Champions (TOC), Glenbrooks, and the Harvard Invitational*

The third tier is the largest of the other five tiers and is made up of tournaments carry a higher level of prestige compared to other “regular season” tournaments, but are not put on the same level as NFL Nationals or the MBA Extemp Round Robin. CFL Nationals and the Extemp TOC fall in the standings, as last year CFL Nationals was a first tier tournament and the Extemp TOC was a second tier tournament. In the case of CFL Nationals, it has been dropped because it is a shorter version of NFL Nationals, does not carry the same level of geographic participation, and its judging is not on the same level as NFL. Also, for the Extemp TOC, its drop is mostly due to a lack of numbers in the field last year, but if it is able to get a substantial number of participants for this year it could rise into the second tier next year. Glenbrooks and the Harvard Invitational move above other regular season tournaments because of their high level of participation and because of their recognition as early season national tournaments.

CFL semi-finalists will still earn twenty-five bonus points for their finishes, but since the tournament does not recognize the placings of its semi-finalists they will only earn a flat twenty-five points instead of having it indexed like NFL semi-finalists.

<b><i>Ranking</i></b>	<b><i>Points Earned</i></b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	100
2 <sup>nd</sup>	85
3 <sup>rd</sup>	70
4 <sup>th</sup>	50
5 <sup>th</sup>	43
6 <sup>th</sup>	39
<i>CFL Semi-Finalist</i>	25

*Fourth Tier: The Yale Invitational, George Mason University Patriot Games, and the Barkley Forum*

The three tournaments in this tier were selected because they have a wider participation than tournaments in the fifth tier, but lack the level of prestige the tournaments in the third tier carry. Most of the tournaments listed here have a long history of competition or their fields in extemp have traditionally been among the stronger of the regular season tournaments in the country. Currently, Extemp Central has chosen not to recognize the George Mason University Extemp Round Robin because that would result in “double counting” the tournament because the Round Robin has the same competitors in it as the regular tournament.

<b><i>Ranking</i></b>	<b><i>Points Earned</i></b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	70
2 <sup>nd</sup>	60
3 <sup>rd</sup>	50
4 <sup>th</sup>	35
5 <sup>th</sup>	30
6 <sup>th</sup>	27

*Fifth Tier: The Wake Forest National Early Bird, the St. Mark's Heart of Texas Invitational, and the California Invitational*

This is the final tier for this year's National Points Race. The tournaments here are included because they have a degree of national recognition, but over the last several seasons have included more regional fields than tournaments in the earlier tiers.

The one significant difference that exists in this tier concerns the St. Mark's Heart of Texas Invitational. Last year, St. Mark's was "double counted" and extempers earned points twice based on their performance in International and United States extemp. This year, the results sheet of St. Mark's will compare extempers performance in both fields and an extemper's performance in both tournaments will decide their ranking. For example, if an extemper finishes first in International and second in U.S. they will be ranked above someone who finishes first in U.S. and third in International. A detailed breakdown of how this was calculated will be posted after St. Mark's concludes.

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Points Earned</i>
1 <sup>st</sup>	40
2 <sup>nd</sup>	35
3 <sup>rd</sup>	30
4 <sup>th</sup>	15
5 <sup>th</sup>	12
6 <sup>th</sup>	10

In two weeks, the 2009-2010 season gets started in North Carolina with the Wake Forest National Early Bird. It should be a great year for the National Points Race and remember, stay tuned in to Extemp Central to find out who's moving up and who's moving down in the standings. A more complete summary of the first quarter of this year's points race will be revealed in the second edition this season's *Ex Files*, to be released prior to the Glenbrooks.

# Budget Deficit Politics

By Logan Scisco

During the “off season” after NFL Nationals, the issue of the budget deficit has come to be a major one in American politics. It has the potential to shape the outcome of the midterm elections in 2010 and is playing a role in President Barack Obama’s declining popularity ratings. As extempers get ready for the 2009-2010 season, which starts in less than six weeks with the Wake Forest National Early Bird, they will face questions about an array of economic issues such as unemployment, the effectiveness of the stimulus package, and the level of international trade as well as the controversial issue of healthcare reform. All of these issues have something to do with the budget of the United States government and by proxy the deficit the U.S. government currently finds itself facing.

Americans in the late 1990s got used to seeing fiscal discipline on Capitol Hill between the executive and legislative branches. President Bill Clinton worked with Republican leaders on Capitol Hill, a relationship that was often tense through impeachment proceedings and a government shutdown, to craft a budget that was balanced and that ran a surplus totaling \$128 billion. In fact, the major issue of the 2000 election between Vice-President Al Gore and then-Texas Governor George W. Bush was over what to do with this budget surplus, with Gore arguing that it needed to be used to shore up entitlement programs such as Social Security in a “lockbox” and Bush arguing that it needed to be given back to the American people in the form of a tax cut. After the first presidential debate between the two men in the fall of 2000, *Saturday Night Live* had a hilarious mock debate over this issue.

After Bush won the election, he was able to get Congress to approve his tax cut package and celebrated the occasion as a victory for small government. However, thanks to September 11<sup>th</sup> and a U.S. recession that began after Bush was elected, the federal government started to see deficits early in the Bush administration. By the time Bush left office, he and Congress, which was controlled for six years of his administration by Republicans, left the country with nearly a \$500 billion deficit. To put this into perspective, that number represents nearly three percent of America’s gross domestic product (GDP), the total value of goods and services produced within the U.S. in a given year.

Therefore, this topic brief will describe the state of the budget deficit under the Obama administration, how Congress and the Obama administration are trying to cope with it, and the political fallout on the budget deficit issue.

## Obama and the Deficit

By the latest estimates, the federal government’s deficit has ballooned under the Obama administration to \$1.8 trillion. Deficits of this size were unthinkable before, but as last week’s edition of *The Economist* pointed out, the current size of the deficit is related to three factors. First, tax revenue for the federal government has fallen as the economy has contracted over the last year. With the economy shrinking, businesses have shut down and wealthy taxpayers do not have as much income to tax and middle class Americans, some of whom have been laid off from work or have had to accept pay cuts, have shrinking incomes to tax as well. A second factor is the interest of the national debt that the federal government must pay to creditors. Those who were not a fan of the stimulus package argued that much of it was financed by the Chinese government, which holds over \$500 billion of U.S. national debt. A final factor is the way that Obama and his predecessor have handled the economic crisis. The infamous Troubled Asset Recovery Program (TARP), meant to help financial institutions, cost the federal government \$700 billion. Obama’s stimulus package, the so-called Recovery and Reinvestment Act cost the government another \$787 billion. And keep in mind that the size of the current healthcare legislation is said to be \$1 trillion.

There is one message from economists concerning the U.S. and its massive deficits: get used to them. Based on the three factors outlined above, the current pace of U.S. government spending will only decrease the deficit from \$1.8 trillion to \$1.2 trillion by 2019, which is considered a big year because that is when entitlement programs such as Medicare and Social Security will begin to dig a bigger hole in the deficit and make it grow even larger.

If you are looking at how much GDP is being swallowed by the deficit, the current amounts are over five percent. The current Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke prefers to have the deficit at three percent of GDP, arguing that anything higher is simply unsustainable for the government to have and that higher debt burdens will eventually reduce investor confidence in the American economy.

Obama has tried to take the stance that he is committed to bringing these deficits down when an economic recovery takes place, which his economic team argues will start next year. However, to many Americans Obama is not moving quick enough to solve this deficit problem and his willingness to spend federal money on legislation that they perceive have had little effect on the economy is not helping him politically, especially in states that are hard hit by the economic recession.

### **Combating the Deficit**

Sensing that there is political danger in playing with the deficit, especially since they promised to bring more fiscal accountability to Washington when they won the 2006 midterm elections, Democrats in the House of Representatives passed legislation last month that would reinstate “pay as you go” rules to federal spending. The “pay as you go” principle, also called “pay go” for short, is that if the federal government tries to spend federal revenue that is non-existent in the form of new programs or tax cuts that there are automatic spending cuts in other parts of the budget or taxes are raised to pay for them. However, before anyone out there gets any wild ideas about the cuts that take place, consider that programs such as Medicaid, food stamps, Social Security payments, and many parts of the Medicare program are exempt from automatic cuts since those programs are seen as helping the most vulnerable of Americans, notably the poor and the elderly.

While this idea makes sense because it could potentially lead to more fiscal responsibility from legislators, there are problems with “pay as you go” rules in their current form. First, the “pay as you go” rules can be waived aside by Congressional leaders if they really want to push for tax cuts or a new federal program which weakens their effectiveness. Second, the current rules make it possible for Republicans and other political forces to reinstitute the Bush tax cuts without having to adhere to the “pay as you go” rules. Finally and maybe most important, under the July legislation, appropriation bills, which often have lots of “pork” and unnecessary spending, are not subject to the “pay as you go” rules.

It is hardly any wonder that after this legislation was passed, Congressional Republicans argued that it was an attempt by the Democratic leadership to make it appear to the American people that their party was getting tough on the budget deficit when it had no intention to do so. For “Blue Dog” Democrats, those Democrats elected from conservative districts and who have committed themselves to fiscally conservative principles, the legislation was a symbolic attempt to shore up their fiscal credibility in the eyes of their constituents, which for some is painfully needed in light of healthcare reform and the cap and trade legislation.

Another way of deficit reduction is coming in the form of taxation. On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, on an edition of *This Week* on ABC, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner refused to say that tax increases were not coming in the future. While this might not be news if it only dealt with tax increases on the wealthiest Americans, that does not appear to be the case on closer inspection. Extempers should keep in mind that the latest

healthcare legislation does impose a tax on wealthy Americans to make up part of the program, so giving rich Americans a “double whammy” in the form of taxes may not be a great idea, because there is only so much that you can soak the rich, especially to make up for a budget shortfall. Therefore, any tax increases may have to come on those Americans that are part of the middle class, which Obama defined during the 2008 campaign as those making less than \$250,000 a year. Geithner clarified that these tax increases may only happen when the economy starts to witness a recovery, but any tax increases like these do put Obama in a tricky political position, as he promised no tax increases at all on this group and is probably astute enough to know that Bush 41 lost his re-election campaign to Bill Clinton because he violated his “no new tax pledge” from 1988. Ironically, Bush’s decision to back off of that pledge was because of America’s budget deficits.

## **Political Fallout**

While Americans are not always given credit for their economic prowess, a significant part of the American electorate is beginning to take notice of the deficit issue. According to a recent *Wall Street Journal/NBC* poll, nearly a quarter of Americans believe that the budget deficit is the most important issue facing the country. On top of that, nearly forty percent of Americans do not believe that Obama is taking the problem of the deficit seriously, pointing to his programs that he is appearing to want to rush through on healthcare and climate change.

To put this in an even bigger perspective, Obama’s popularity ratings have come down to “normal” levels, as voters are not seeing any relief of their economic problems. Part of this is because of the Obama team’s decision to sell the stimulus package so as to prevent unemployment from nearing ten percent. However, economists now expect unemployment to hit that mark by the end of the year and it does not help that unemployment is what economists consider to be a lagging indicator, one that does not necessarily reflect the conditions for the economy.

Although it is unlikely that the Republicans will be able to win nearly forty House seats to wrest control of the body, as a party has only won those numbers on two occasions, 1946 and 1994, the deficit does allow them to repair some of their fiscal credentials that were shattered under Bush. As the party completely out of power, the Republicans cannot be blamed for much of the current economic mess, whether the Democratic Party likes that or not. Since they control all of Capitol Hill, all policies bear the Democrats insignia and for some “Blue Dog” members, they are facing immense criticism in their districts over government spending and Obama’s social policies. RNC Chairman Michael Steele has made the deficit a major part of the Republican platform and young Republican Congressman such as Paul Ryan of Wisconsin are trying to center the party on fiscally conservative principles.

The deficit is also helping Republicans in their fight against healthcare reform. Although the Obama administration has tried to sell the reforms as deficit neutral, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has estimated that the healthcare legislation will add \$239 billion to the federal deficit over by 2019 and increase significantly in costs after that point. Faced with these prospects and voter discontent over mortgaging America’s future with deficit spending, the conservative Congressman the Democrats have to rely on to pass healthcare reform may not go along and a failure to pass healthcare reform when the party has a majority on Capitol Hill would be embarrassing. It may not be Obama’s “Waterloo” if he fails to pass healthcare reform, but it would not endear him to the Democratic base. The healthcare debate can also recast the Republicans as the party of smaller government and limited intervention, although they still have to reconcile this with their willingness to use big government as an instrument to appease their social conservative allies on topics such as abortion, gun rights, and gay marriage.

Economic problems in general could wreak havoc for the Democratic party in 2009 and 2010. The 2009 gubernatorial elections in Virginia and New Jersey will likely be viewed as early referendums on the



Obama administration, and although the Virginia governor's race is neck and neck, it appears that New Jersey's Democratic Governor John Corzine is in trouble and could lose. Couple this with rising unemployment in Michigan (nearing 20%) and Ohio and you have recipe for disaster as far as Democrats are concerned in some battleground states. Despite this, the Democrats can probably weather some losses in 2010 as far as the House goes because they are primed to win four to five Senate seats based on the latest projections. Nevertheless, if the economic situation continues to deteriorate and American's continue to feel anxiety about the state of the economy, their jobs, and the budget deficit it may help the chances of former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney to win the Republican primary and successfully challenge and defeat Obama in 2012 for the presidency.

