



May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

My fellow coaches,

I am writing you today as a fifteen year participant in the California High School Speech Association; I not only competed in the Southern Valley Forensics League (Area 2) for four years myself at one of the poorest schools in the area, but I have now coached for eleven years in this league. To say forensics is important to me would be an understatement, but beyond even that, forensics in the Central Valley of California is extremely important not only to me, but to our greater community. According to the US Census, citizens of the Central Valley are quite literally some of the poorest in the nation. Our unemployment rates are substantially higher than the rest of the state (and nation), our median family income is far lower, and because of all of that, our students- the most vulnerable among us- suffer. For many of our students, forensics is truly their only way to get to college because, without the opportunities and scholarships forensics provides, many would never be able to actually afford to obtain a higher education. When CHSSA talks about electronics disproportionately creating a disadvantage for poorer communities, we are *exactly* who you are talking about.

Given that fact, you may be surprised to learn that I am an adamant proponent of us allowing computer usage in Public Forum debate for several key reasons.

**Cost:** Whenever we discuss adding electronics in forensics, there is always a collective bristle about the unreasonable cost of transition to electronic media. The reality is that electronics save teams money-- *and I say that from experience*. Three years ago, my team fundraised together and bought a set of team Kindles (\$39 a piece on sale). Now, that may seem like a lot, but we saved a ton of money by switching to this form of media. For years, we had two to three relatively large tubs we lugged everywhere just for extemp, full of reams and reams of paper. Hundreds of pages, tons of ink. And because we were banned from printing at school, the kids and I had to absorb this cost ourselves. Did you know Kinko's charges 10 cents a page to print a simple one sided black and white document?

Our savings here were substantial and immediate. You'll have to forgive me for forcing

math on you, but I feel like it's necessary for us to look at the reality of the expenditure here. Even conservatively, the numbers break out (incredibly roughly) something like this for my relatively small team:

**Extemp:** 500 pages (and again, that's conservative) x 10 cents a page = **\$50**

**LD:** 2 (4 page cases) x 10 kids = 80 pages

80 pages x 4 topics a year over the CHSSA season = 320 pages

250 page briefs x 4 copies to use in practice/ share/ cut = 1000 pages

x 2 brief sets per topic = 2000 pages

2000 pages x 4 topics a year = 8000 pages

**8320 pages x \$.10 = \$832**

We don't do policy, which is the event that really benefits from an electronic storage device, but let's break out what the likely savings would be for Public Forum:

2 (4 page cases) x 10 teams = 80 pages

80 pages x 7 topics a year = 560 pages

250 page briefs x 4 copies to use in practice/ share/ cut = 1000 pages

x 2 brief sets per topic = 2000 pages

2000 pages x 7 topics a year = 14,000 pages

**14,560 pages x \$.10 = \$1456**

Meanwhile, purchasing 20 Kindle E-Readers runs a team of 20 \$780--- and the Kindles have lasted 3 years without any issues. So, the cost breakdown is something like this:

**Kindles:** \$780 for 20 units- one time cost.

**Paper:** \$50+\$832+\$1456 = \$2338

\$2338 x 3 years = \$7014

So, over a three year period, a team of 20 will save roughly (and at least) \$6234 by switching to digital media. This is a *no brainer* for teams where money is an issue (which, frankly, is all of us).

**Precedent:** CHSSA has already set the precedent that electronic retrieval devices are ok in our other debate events, so virtually every proposed harm or disadvantage to allowing electronics

in Public Forum is, at best, completely non unique.

Worse yet, we are putting our competitors at an extreme disadvantage when they do travel out of state to compete. Now, I understand that not many teams have the ability to travel extensively-- we certainly don't (in fact we go to maybe two invitationals a year, both in California). But the reality is that there are teams that do travel and we all have kids that compete for the NSDA, too, representing *all of us* here in California at the National Championships. Why would we knowingly and willingly put our students at a disadvantage? There are only four states that ban electronic devices in PF: Vermont, Wyoming, Montana, and California. Is that really a list we want to be a part of? I'd certainly say no.

**Fairness:** As we all know, fairness can most certainly be a voting issue and has been brought up several times in the course of this particular electronics debate. More specifically, the concept of competitive equity. Like I said earlier, the valley in which I coach is a poor one. Fifty four percent (54%) of students in the Kern High School District are on free or reduced lunch<sup>1</sup> and eighty percent (80%) of those in Fresno Unified qualify for the same program<sup>2</sup>. The median household income for the San Joaquin Valley is \$45,679<sup>3</sup>-- compared to other parts of California where median household income skyrockets over \$100,000.

Getting funding for our programs often seems like an exercise in futility, but we do it anyway because we know how important this activity is. In the Valley, we don't get big donors or patrons who supplement our team budgets (if the schools even give us team budgets-- many in our league receive zero funds from administration to help with team costs), but we make due and cut costs where we can. As you can see in the first point, electronic devices afford us the opportunity to get the most "bang" for our buck. Beyond that, electronics grant us the ability to have the same resources that large, well-funded programs have at their disposal – and all without costing us money we plainly do not have.

**Environmental Impacts:** We live in a state that is on the verge of an environmental crisis because of the drought. Regardless of where you land on the political spectrum, we each have an obligation to our students and society to help guide these kids into making choices that are

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1 <http://www.bakersfield.com/News/2009/08/28/More-applying-for-free-reduced-price-school-meals.html>

2 <http://abc30.com/archive/6343267/>

3 <http://www.forbes.com/places/ca/bakersfield/> & <http://www.forbes.com/places/ca/fresno/>

better for the world in which we live. Making one *single* sheet of paper can use 13 oz of water<sup>4</sup>. Production of 1 ton of copy paper (400 reams or 200,000 pages) produces 19,075 gallons of waste water alone<sup>5</sup>. Given these facts, it is downright irresponsible for us to continue to waste mounds of paper a year in our activity when there are alternatives that have few substantive negative impacts.

Ultimately, while I understand the trepidation many have about switching completely over to a system that is new and unfamiliar to many, the reality is that technology in forensics has far-reaching benefits for all of us. Like any application of something new, there will be issues, but as Esther Dyson once said: "Part of the problem is when we bring in a new technology we expect it to be perfect in a way that we don't expect the world that we're familiar with to be perfect." The fact that we've had some hiccups implementing technology in the other events is no reason to continue to shy away from technology in Public Forum. After all, as we all tell our students, it is only through practice that we can truly improve.

Thank you so much for taking the time to give some thought to my position. I look forward to a not too far off future where we have a favorable resolution here. If you have any questions about anything I've said here, please don't hesitate to shoot me an email, as I'd be happy to discuss or assist in any way I can.

Thank you,



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4 "Clean Technologies in U.S. Industries: Focus on the Pulp and Paper Industry." United States-Asia Environmental Partnership (Washington, D.C.: September 1997)

5 <http://icap.sustainability.illinois.edu/files/projectupdate/2308/CertifiedGreenOfficeMeeting-Sept.pdf>