I am writing in response to Ms. Ronald’s missive. I should point out that the rationale in the by-law proposal, a far more extensive one than is usual for CHSSA by-law changes, was the original pro- argument. Mr. Johnson’s response was an attempt to balance the by-law rationale (which certainly will be seen by most coaches). Ms. Ronald’s missive, then, is not a message that would counter Mr. Johnson’s letter, but a continuation of a debate already begun. Nevertheless, Ms. Ronald’s arguments cry out for rebuttal.

Ms. Ronald has two basic premises. That public forum debaters need hundreds or thousands of pages of evidence and that teams are forced either to use technology to store the thousands of pages, or to copy those thousands of pages at Kinkos.

Public forum is the second iteration from team debate where the powers-that-be are trying to get away from the camp-influenced culture that says that you can only win debate if you have tons of tubs of evidence generated at camps, much of which the students haven’t read, most of which the students don’t understand, much less explain, but that they have to have and read in rounds. Lincoln Douglas was the first such attempt. With shorter speeches, shorter debate overall, a values basis and switching topics more frequently, LD would be immune from the camp influence. Sadly it was not as immune as was thought.

Mr. Johnson was a strong advocate against computers in team debate, which was the first event in which CHSSA permitted computers. The argument that persuaded the Council in the end was the massive amounts of evidence that have become customary (sadly) in that event. Mr. Johnson also strongly advocated against computers in LD, as did I, as neither of us felt they were needed. The major argument to allowing computers in LD was the fact that we had allowed them in Policy, but no compelling need was ever given for them in CHSSA competitions. It was really the camp style preference for the computers and not the needs of CHSSA coaches or students in general that was the motivation behind that movement.

So, a few years ago, history repeated itself. California and the NFL again decided that the best way to have an event where people who value argumentation and not volume of evidence is to create a new one. You can see in the rules a continuation of the departure of LD from team. Shorter prep, shorter speeches, more frequent topic changes, all designed to prevent students from having mountains of evidence. Public forum is NOT about having 250 page briefs. But now, camp style debaters want to take over public forum.

If we are going to keep public forum as it was originally conceived, we must reject attempts to turn it into another tons of tubs (electronic now) event. Why would students who want to compete in a tons-of-tubs event ever want to participate in public forum to begin with?

Ms. Ronald’s second premise is the false dichotomy that teams have to choose between kindles and kinkos. Even if I were to desire thousands of pages for an academic activity, I would get a carton of paper and a toner cartridge. I can get it all for $200. (It is also noted that the analysis should also consider the costs of laptops, which the Motion contemplates, and not the cost of a kindle that is not comparable to the desired laptops)

She then goes on to say that it computer is used everywhere but a few backward states, so we don’t want to be among them. I never understood the value of doing what everyone else is doing if we think that what they are doing is wrong. Why should I make a mistake just because everyone else is doing it? The problem is not that SOME teams may have the privilege of participating in SOME competitions out of state. Our duty in CHSSA is to make sure that the competitions over which we do have purview provide the most positive experience for the students. If those students want to public forum outside of California, they have the choice of continuing what they are doing or using computers.

And I do not concede that we have allowed computers in other debate events without harm to the events. What this argument actually amounts to is, “you have lost in other events, why not just give up this one, too.” That protests are not widespread does not mean that abuse is not rampant. It simply means that what abuse exists is not reported because a) it is almost impossible to prove, b) there is a mentality of, if you can’t beat them, join them, spreading the abuse even further and c) there is also a mentality that rules are really guidelines, to be read and ignored (and I have learned this last one from experience). The only argument that can be made that the events have not been harmed is that they were already going in that direction before the introduction of technology.

There is no reason to bring computers in to public forum. The argument that it is cheaper to use technology than paper is misguided. The question is do we allow public forum to become just another debate that requires tons of tubs or do we hold fast for an event that, with 4 four-minute constructives and 4 two-minute rebuttals, really does not need tons of evidence. We have a choice. We should preserve public forum to be the event it is supposed to be.

I should mention that I am a technology teacher. For many years, I have taught computer literacy, web design and computer programing. I will be teaching a new course next year that uses technology, but in the context of working with data so that the student get credit for Algebra 2. I have a mathematics credential with an auxiliary authorization for computer concepts and applications. I created CHSSA’s first website under the direction of Andara Macdonald, and I still have a toe or two in CHSSA’s technological footprint. So whatever you think of these arguments, they do not come from a technophobe. But I understand technology and I understand when it helps and when it hinders.