CHSSA - Internet Prep in Parli

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The use of internet should be allowed in parliamentary debate preparation time.

First, this would make the activity more equitable. In the status quo, students are allowed to use their laptops, but cannot connect to the internet. This incentivizes students to hoard as much data offline as possible. Students download Wikipedia and use Extemp Genie to store thousands of news articles. This harms equity because not all students can afford laptops that can store the entire Wikipedia on their hard drive. In contrast, if internet were allowed, a $70 Chromebook would allow a student to compete on the same level as students with expensive laptops. Extemp Genie is a paid service, and also one that benefits larger squads that have more students saving articles into the squad database. Large squads also work to compile research briefs on every possible topic, and thus massively out-prepare small squads. Google levels the playing field because it gives students from small squads and students from large squads access to the same information during preparation time.

Second, this would make the activity more educational. There is no real-world scenario where policy-makers make decisions based on an offline copy of Wikipedia and without internet access, so it is unclear what real-world skills the current rules are supposed to cultivate. Lack of internet prep encourages students to focus on the quantity of pre-tournament prep rather than the quality. When preparing for tournaments that allow internet prep, students can, instead of spending their time hoarding news articles, focus on developing a big-picture understanding of economic theory, foreign policy, and other complex subjects that cannot be learned in a 20-minute Google search. This mirrors the real world, where economists, for instance, work to obtain an understanding of the underlying connection between GDP growth rates and inflation rates, but don’t memorize what those rates are every day, because this information can be easily looked up online. Further, the availability of internet prep would encourage students to actually engage with topics they are not familiar with. Without internet prep, if students encounter a resolution that is not covered on Wikipedia, they are incentivized to rely on generic canned arguments that can be used for any resolution.