

Politics and Extemp

By Shawn Augsburger

According to the National Forensic League a extemp judge ought to not judge the speech on whether they agree with the speakers opinion, but rather the judge the quality of the speech itself. While this does theoretically state that the speaker can take any stance on an issue this doesn't mean that the speaker will easily succeed with a controversial fringe stance on an issue. Part of the successful extemp speech is that of having a definite tenable answer to the question. In other words if your position can't reasonably be defended from criticism as being a fringe position your judge may find your speech as being sarcastic or that possibly you are using fabricated evidence. This is not to advocate that you to muddle your position, because extemp requires an absolute answer. You can not simply fence sit. The goal of the extemp speaker is to give a definite answer. If they do not have a firm answer than your message becomes muddled and your speech will be rather boring or conflicting. For an idea of the role of answering a question has look at my example question:

Examples:

Question: Will Ralph Nader win the US Presidency?

Bad Answer 1: Maybe. (This answer is an attempt to fence sit. Therefore, this is not a definite answer to the question.

Bad Answer 2: Yes, Ralph Nader will win decisively in 2004.(This answer suffers from being politically inaccurate. While some Greens out there will say that I am being unfair, there are no mainstream political commentators who would seriously say this.)

Good Answer: No, he is a fringe candidate.

Better Answer: No, while he has a strong following in strong liberal states such as California and New York his political views are too far to the left for the vast majority of American voters.

While my example focused on an election result this can extend to other stances as well. For example it is probably hard to advocate that US foreign policy should allow for the president to declare war upon any country for which the United States finds doesn't agree with. On the other hand an extreme pacifistic stance of stating that the United States should not ever go to war with any county that has not attacked the United States would also be a challenging position to defend. While there is certainly sources that could support either theoretical stance in an extemp speech one would find that there are either very few

sources to cite or that the sources that might advocate such a position are so biased that most educated judges will not be convinced that you have shown a very good case for your stancel.

Hence, the moral of the story is that while it may be fun to be a radical unless you personally know that your judge is politically aligned towards your view or is so dense they will buy anything (not very likely) you are better off not advocating zany positions (animals are equal to humans, free speech is absolute, etc.)