



Winning Ideas for High School Debate

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase fiscal redistribution in the United States by adopting a federal jobs guarantee, expanding Social Security, and/or providing a basic income.

What is the Affirmative's evidence of inequality?

Unless they are using [the study results](#) produced by [Boston University Prof. Laurence Kotlikoff](#) and his colleagues, the affirmative's numbers are almost certainly wrong.

Conventional descriptions of inequality fail to separate people by age. As a result;

Statements about wealth inequality end up comparing 20-year-olds (just starting out in their adult life) with 80-year-olds (who have had a lifetime of accumulation).

Statements about income inequality end up comparing people at the peak of their careers with youngsters just starting out.

Comparing people at the same age avoids some of these problems but not others. Comparing the income of a blue-collar worker with that of a medical student would lead us to conclude that the former is a lot better off than the latter. But over an entire work life, the reverse is true.

Finally, almost all conventional measure of inequality ignore the full array of entitlement benefits received under the current system.

These types of comparisons do not identify any social problem that warrants solving.

The only proper measure of inequality is to compare the life time income (after taxes and after the receipt of entitlement benefits) of people in the same generation. The [Kotlikoff study](#) is the only study that does this.

What is the affirmative's evidence of harm produced by inequality?

Almost all studies of how inequality affects behavior are based on the types of faulty numbers described above. These studies are therefore unreliable.

What is the source of funds the affirmative proposes to redistribute?

Unless the affirmative advocates a consumption tax, taking money from those at the top of the income ladder almost certainly means removing capital from the capital market.

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But less capital means less investment and, therefore, lower economic growth. Since economic growth is the most effective anti-poverty program ever discovered, the affirmative plan would make future poor people poorer than they otherwise would be. [It could actually increase future inequality.](#)

Taxing corporations would be an even worse alternative. Kotlikoff and colleagues have shown that the corporate income tax is almost entirely paid by workers in the form of lower wages – in the US country and elsewhere around the world.

A corporate income tax therefore, would fail to satisfy the topic's requirement of redistribution from the top to the bottom of the income ladder. The net result could be more inequality, not less.

Who will qualify to receive the redistributed funds?

Will the funds be means tested? If not (if we give a basic grant to everyone, for example), 80% to 90% of the funds will be “wasted” – failing to accomplish what the topic seems to require.

If there is a means test (conditioning the receipt of funds based on the income and the assets of the recipients), the affirmative plan runs the risk of exacerbating the harms caused by the current welfare system: [discouraging work](#) and [discouraging marriage](#). These harms

have been quantified by Kotlikoff, et. al., and they are very large.

Will the redistribution work through existing social welfare programs?

Existing social welfare programs (e.g., [Social Security](#)) are very defective. If the affirmative proposes to pour more money into these programs, we will be exacerbating [the harm](#) these programs already cause.

If the affirmative proposes to reform these programs (making them work better), then why not wait to see if the reforms actually work before pouring more money into them.

If the affirmative plans to create brand new programs (thereby avoiding the problems with existing ones), why should we expect that the new programs will work any better than the existing ones.

Negative counter plans.

Without redistributing money from the top to the bottom of the income ladder, we can substantially reduce inequality by:

1. Reforming Social Security.
2. Reforming the welfare system.
3. Repealing taxes on the poor.

Background materials for this analysis can be found at the [Goodman Institute Debater Resources Site](#).



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