

# 2010 CFL Nationals Extemp Topic Area Analysis

by Logan Scisco

This weekend extempers will converge on Omaha, Nebraska for the 2010 Catholic Forensic League Grand National tournament. Each year, Extemp Central provides an analysis of the topic areas that will be used at Catholic Forensic League and National Forensic League Nationals. These analyses are meant to help extempers identify issues that could arise during a round and offer a few tips on dealing with each topic area. Also, the analyses provide practice questions so that extempers can do practice outlines or speeches for each topic area before the tournament.

Before going into each topic area, it is important to give an overview of the tournament for extempers who have never been before. CFL Nationals takes place over two days, with four rounds of competition on each day. On the first day, four preliminary rounds are held and each round is adjudicated by three judges. The forty-eight extempers with the lowest cumulative scores advance to octo-finals the next day and the field is halved over another three rounds until a final field of six is set. All outrounds, with the exception of finals, are adjudicated by three judges. Finals has five judges. The tournament is not cumulative until finals. To determine the winner, CFL has an interesting formula where preliminary ranks do not matter (like NFL), and extempers earn a "rank" for octos, quarters, and semis. What this means is that if you go 1-2-2 and have the best score in your octo-final round you earn a 1 (and if you went (2-1-3 in that round and finished behind the speaker who earned a 1-2-2 you would earn a 2). All of the judges scores in finals count into your cumulative score so the extemper who has the lowest cumulative score across eight ballots wins. Keep in mind that with this formula it is important, but not necessarily vital, for you to win all of your elimination rounds. As an example, when I was in the 2003 CFL final round, I had finished third in my octofinal round and then second in quarters and semis. Other competitors in the round like the eventual winner Greg Wagman had won their octo, quarter, and semi rounds. Therefore, entering the final I was already four ranks behind. If you win all of your elimination rounds heading into the final you will have a slight advantage, but if you bomb the final round, where over sixty percent of your scores come from, then you won't walk out of Omaha with the national championship.

I should also point out that to win CFL you really need to emphasize delivery over content. Sometimes I think good extempers would have a better chance navigating a Sri Lankan minefield than navigating the CFL judging pool because the standards of judging at the tournament are not the same as NFL. For example, in a semi-final round last year none of the judges knew how to give time signals in the event and the first speaker in the room received no time signals which might have cost them a spot in the final round. I've seen parents of interp kids given semi-final or finals ballots and they have no idea what the event is. Now don't get me wrong, I don't have any problem with these people judging at the tournament. However, they should be judging prelims at best or the earliest elimination rounds at worst. Considering these circumstances, for any extempers attending the tournament I would suggest three things: don't go fast, don't stumble more than twice, and be as funny as possible. If there was ever a tournament designed for entertainment it is CFL Nationals.

If extempers check CFL's website, [www.ncfl.org](http://www.ncfl.org), they will notice that there are nine topic areas listed. Astute extempers will note that my description of the tournament only listed eight rounds. Unlike NFL, CFL does not determine in advance what topic area will be in each round. Instead, the topic areas are randomly drawn prior to the rounds and advanced to the prep room. Extempers won't have advance notice of what each topic area will be, so you have to be prepared for anything. Since there are only eight rounds, one of the topic areas won't be utilized. Only three of the topic areas have a non-U.S. bent to them and the other five have more of a domestic focus (although the State Department round will likely function as a U.S. foreign policy round so it's a mix of IX and USX). As I said last year, CFL Nationals

tend to favor domestic extempers although IX'ers have had their fair share of success at this tournament before. However, if you lack a command of domestic issues your chances of winning the tournament are slim.

Before I analyze the topics the last piece of advice that I would give to any extemper out there is that in the week before the tournament sit down and identify what your strongest topic areas are and what your weakest topic areas are. After you have done this, read as much as you can on your weakest topic area and practice doing outlines and speeches with it. Don't rely on hope that your weakest topic area won't be drawn or that you can survive it in prelims and cruise through outrounds. The worst topic areas (i.e. "religion and philosophy" or "media and reporting") always find their way into quarters, semis, and finals.

### **Topic Area #1: Americas, Non-U.S.**

As this topic area implies, this round will focus on Canada, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. I guess they had some complaints about last year's "Americas" topic area so they felt the need to put the "non-U.S." qualifier on the end of it. In what is becoming a trend, the leftist direction of Latin America continues to be emphasized by the international media. Cooperation between Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Nicaragua, Bolivia, etc. continues with Hugo Chavez and his brand of "Bolivarian socialism" creating headaches for U.S. foreign policy and Americas allies in the region like Colombia. Since 2009, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua have abolished presidential term limits and that had led commentators to question whether democratic safeguards in the region are being enhanced or are falling apart. Extempers can expect questions about these safeguards in-round, especially because of Chavez's hard line tactics against political opponents in the run up to legislative elections.

Drug violence and kidnappings in Mexico will also be an issue extempers have to confront in this round. With drug violence continuing to rise, President Felipe Calderon had taken to asking for U.S. assistance and blaming the U.S. for allowing assault weapons to cross over the border. The violence has also taken a toll on Calderon's popularity and his use of the military instead of the police to squelch drug violence has come under fire from human rights activists. Also, Calderon's criticisms of Arizona's new immigration law might emerge in this round.

Brazil's rising international role, especially after its recent brokering of Iran's nuclear fuel swap arrangement and role in the G20, will likely be a question. The political futures of the Kirchner's in Argentina and the success of its recent bond swap can be expected to be questions as well.

The spat between Venezuela and Colombia will also be an issue in this round as tensions between both nations continue to rise. Colombia has accused Venezuela of providing assistance to FARC rebels and Venezuela's arms buildup with Russian help has ratcheted up tensions in the region. Colombia's presidential election also has created problems because Chavez has threatened an embargo on Colombia if Juan Manuel Santos wins the Colombia presidential election.

As far as the Caribbean is concerned, extempers should be prepared for any questions about the fate of Cuba and if it is moving closer to democracy under Raul Castro (and maybe even an embargo question). Also, the spat over Honduras is likely to be a topic after Venezuela boycotted an EU-Latin America summit in Madrid because Honduran President Porfirio Lobo attended. For Canada, steps taken by the Conservative government on fuel standards for trucking and environmental criticisms it has endured over its policy with oil sands could be questions. Also, a random Vancouver Winter Olympics question could work its way in.

For international topic areas I always recommend that extempers try to relate these issues to the U.S. As I said last year, when you're trying to explain the intricacies of the Venezuelan economy you can easily lose a judge unless you use parallels to things that they understand.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Who will win the Colombian presidential election?
2. Why has the use of the Mexican military only increased drug violence in areas along the US-Mexican border?
3. Will Hugo Chavez's recent offensive against Venezuela's financial firms make Venezuela's economic situation worse?

### **Topic Area #2: Europe & Asia**

This is one REALLY broad topic area. It is curious that the topic writers at CFL this year did not make "The Middle East" a category. As a result, I would assume that "Asia" is where you will find questions dealing with the Middle East. Iran's nuclear program has received more press than any other issue in the region over the course of the season and its latest nuclear deal ties into a bilateral question with Turkey and its role in the region. Iran's support for terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah is also something to consider for this round. The Israeli-Palestinian dispute will also have some questions which will tie into the progress of recent U.S. efforts to spur on the peace process, the construction of settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and the success (or lack thereof) of Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. Israel's concerns about Syria, Lebanon, and Iran will also factor into this round and I would expect that there will be several Israeli foreign policy questions concerned with the chances for peace or military action with any of those three countries. Also, Iraq's sectarian tensions, especially with further draw downs of U.S. forces expected will come up in this round.

For Asian issues, North Korea's aggression in the alleged sinking of a South Korea warship has placed it back on the front pages. The decision of the United States, South Korea, and Japan to press for tighter sanctions creates a problem for China, which has backed North Korea in the past and also creates a problem for the rest of East Asia because North Korea has threatened war if the UN Security Council places more sanctions against the regime. North Korea is already falling apart economically and extempers can expect a question on what the nation will look like once Kim Jong Il dies. As an outgrowth of this topic, extempers should prepare themselves for questions about China's growing role in the international community and how sustainable its economic position is in light of economists warning that its economy is overheating. China's poor human rights record, its supervision of recent elections in Hong Kong, and its push for the ECFA with Taiwan are also places where questions could come from.

Political unrest in Thailand and Myanmar also deserves attention from extempers. Myanmar's junta is pushing for parliamentary elections that will merely rubber stamp its power. The National League for Democracy (NLD), the democratic opposition to the junta has dissolved which is an attempt to make the nation's elections appear illegitimate. Thailand's political unrest is degenerating into civil war and extempers will likely be asked about how the country's political instability could be solved.

The Greek bailout and the British elections will likely have more questions in the Europe part of this topic area than any other issue. The Greek bailout has damaged German chancellor Angela Merkel's political career and touched off a debate over the survival of the euro zone. It has also led to changes in the structure of the European Union for aiding nations that might suffer debt crises in the near future like Spain, Portugal, and Italy. The British elections have led the Conservative Party to power, although they now have to work the Liberal Democrats to maintain a majority in the House of Commons. Extempers can expect questions about Prime Minister David Cameron will change Britain, why he was able to win the election, and how long his coalition with the Liberal Democrats will last.

On other issues, the push by France and Belgium to ban the burqa and concerns in Spain and Italy about illegal immigration from North Africa could find their way into the pile as well. A “Turkey-EU” question is not to be discounted either. Mikhail Khodorkovsky’s challenge of his continued detainment by Russian authorities and Russia’s START agreement with the United States (as well as its renewed ties with Ukraine) will also come up in this round.

For extempers that choose to discuss economic issues in this round, notably the Greek bailout, make sure that you have a good command of the vocabulary necessary to answer the question. Elements of the Greek bailout involve technical financial transactions that an extemper can easily get lost in unless they take the time to research and process information carefully. Even if you know what these technical details are, rehearse explaining them in practice rounds because you only have seven minutes to deliver the speech. If you aren’t clear judges won’t follow and will get frustrated and your ranks will suffer. Also, learning how to pronounce foreign leaders names and citing them can be major brownie points among lay judges.

#### *Practice Questions*

1. Why is support for the Conservative and Labour party falling in Britain?
2. Should the EU kick Greece out of the euro zone?
3. What can the international community do to end the political crisis in Thailand?

#### **Topic Area #3: Africa, Australia & Oceania**

This topic area to me is downright puzzling. The question writers lump Europe and Asia together, which involve a wide range of issues, and then combine these three topic choices. Now correct me if I’m wrong, but it seems that “Asia” would have a much wider array of questions than “Australia and Oceania.” I really think that should have put the Middle East in this topic area, but I digress.

For the Africa element of this question several countries come to mind for this round: Nigeria, Sudan, South Africa, and Somalia. Nigeria’s former president Umaru Yar’Adua died after disappearing for several months and Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as acting president. Considering that the nation has an election next year several are questioning whether Jonathan will attempt to keep power or step down. Also, Nigeria’s problems with the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) continue to fester and their kidnapping of foreign oil workers and destruction of Nigeria’s oil producing capacity are problems that Jonathan has not yet found a solution to. After Sudan’s controversial presidential election earlier in the year, attention has shifted to the Southern Sudanese referendum that will be held next year. According to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, the South will have the opportunity to vote next year for independence. Due to political and religious tensions, the South is expected for vote for independence but because of oil revenues and other factors the question the international community is asking is whether the North will allow the South to secede peacefully. In South Africa’s case, the World Cup will be hosted there this summer, which has brought the country’s crime rate into focus. Also, racial tensions are rising as the white South Africans who are left fear the Jacob Zuma is looking to confiscate their property, especially farm land, and turn it over to black South Africans. A question extempers could be asked on this issue is “Will South Africa become Zimbabwe?” Somali piracy will also be a question for extempers to wrestle with and how those pirates should be handled is a matter of international importance. Somalia has protested the U.S. detainment and prosecution of suspected pirates, which turns the issue into a U.S. foreign policy matter, but Somalia’s inability to govern itself and its fight against Islamic insurgents will be a question in this round.

For the African continent on the whole, questions about the nation’s ability to sustain democracy and its fight against HIV/AIDS are questions that extempers have been asked for decades and they will appear in

this round as well. Expect to get some questions about how to improve the African economy and whether a common currency or improved infrastructure investments would work. Zimbabwe's political turmoil, the question of who will succeed Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and the ability of African nations to fight al Qaeda are issues that can emerge in this round as well.

On Oceania, extempers can expect to see some questions about Indonesia and the Philippines. I would suggest that extempers read about the latest Filipino election where Benigno Aquino has emerged as the likely winner. The Philippines need economic reform and their fight against Islamic militants requires a great deal of American aid. For Indonesia, the nation needs major economic reforms and has engaged in a massive anti-corruption sweep. Just like the Philippines, Indonesia is fighting against Islamic militants and is looking for U.S. cooperation to fight them off. Since Indonesia is the second largest Muslim nation in the world, the U.S. views cooperation with Indonesia as very important.

In terms of Australia, violence against immigrants and a national debate over immigration policy could come up in this round. Also, the nation has experienced a debate over cap and trade and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has shelved possible legislation until 2013, which is a significant blow to global cap and trade efforts. Also, Rudd's idea of a "super tax" on mine industry profits has created fears that the country will lose domestic investors and that Chinese and Indian firms will end up controlling the Australian mining industry.

However, extempers will likely get the brunt of their questions from this round out of the Africa part of the topic and when you draw three questions from this round that odds are that one of them will pertain to some type of African issue. Therefore, if you know your African countries and issues well then this should not be a difficult topic area for you.

#### *Practice Questions*

1. How much of a blow to international climate change efforts is Australia's decision to abandon a cap and trade plan until 2013?
2. Does religious violence in Nigeria portend badly for the nation's presidential elections next year?
3. How can the international community ensure that the Southern Sudanese independence referendum in 2011 is free and fair?

#### **Topic Area #4: The State Department**

From here on out the topic areas become worded like cabinet departments. Since the function of the State Department is diplomacy extempers can anticipate that this will be a United States foreign policy round. However, since "the State Department" is listed as the topic area you may also get questions about the operations of the State Department and the effectiveness of its actions. As I recommended last year, extempers would be wise to visit each of the cabinet departments in the topic areas and clip briefings from them. Not only will these sound authoritative in rounds, but it will give you more insight into the operations of each of these cabinet departments. I would also suggest printing off biographies of each of the cabinet officials in charge of each department, some of which you can find on the department's respective websites, in case you are given personality questions in these rounds. For example, in this particular topic area you could be given a question about how effective Hillary Clinton has been as our Secretary of State or if someone else could do a better job.

It is very likely that you could give the same speech at CFL Nationals about the same topic but address it from a different direction. For example, in the Americas topic area you might draw a question asking if Venezuela has effectively replaced U.S. influence in Latin America and in this round you could draw a question that asks you how America should deal with Venezuela's influence in Latin America. Since the

tournament is “mixed” extemp you should have domestic and international files at your disposal to answer these types of questions.

As a judge, I love to hear history in foreign policy speeches. Different presidents have taken U.S. foreign policy in different directions. For example President Jimmy Carter placed human rights at the center of his foreign policy and was less willing to back dictatorships that were American allies during the Cold while President Ronald Reagan had a more realist and confrontational approach to the Soviet Union. Since there is not a topic area about President Obama in this tournament, you could get a question asking you to compare Obama’s handling of international problems with George W. Bush. If you lack a historical understanding of shifts in American foreign policy, answering such a question will be difficult.

Just as this round can overlap with the international topic areas in the field, there will also be some overlap with the Homeland Security topic. America’s foreign relations with Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, etc. are predicated on halting the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Extempers can also expect to tackle questions about America utilizing international institutions like the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to confront global challenges in terms of human rights and nuclear proliferation.

President Obama has been criticized for not pushing nations hard enough on democratic reforms like the Bush administration. His response to the Iran protests last year was arguably lackluster and some have called for a more forceful U.S. approach. Also, Obama’s ties with Mexico over drug violence and comprehensive immigration reform could come up in this round.

For pariah states, like North Korea, Myanmar, Cuba, Iran, etc. extempers will be asked how the United States could improve its relations with these nations. When addressing these questions, make sure you give ONE clear answer. Judges won’t be very receptive to speeches were you argue that we can improve relations by “taking three steps.” Have ONE step and communicate to the audience why that one step will work.

#### *Practice Questions*

1. How will the Gulf oil spill impact U.S. relations with Latin America?
2. Why have Obama’s efforts at better relations with Cuba run into a brick wall?
3. Should the U.S. take a tougher stance against North Korea following the sinking of the Cheonan?

#### **Topic Area #5: Agriculture, Interior, Energy, Transportation**

Of all of the topic areas in the tournament, this is arguably the most difficult because extempers don’t usually give speeches on agriculture or transportation issues. The “interior” and “energy” part of the topic make it tolerable, though, if you get a good question draw. As I recommended for the State Department topic brief, extempers would be wise to go to each of these departments websites, print of their mission statements, any recent briefings about them, and biographies of their current departments head (Tom Vilsack-Agriculture, Ken Salazar-Interior, Steven Chu-Energy, and Ray LaHood-Transportation). Since “interior” in this question will refer to environmental affairs I don’t think it’s a stretch to argue that you should go to the Environmental Protection Agency’s website and print off similar information (its head is Lisa Jackson).

For agriculture, America’s food supply is secure, but farmers have questioned practices in the beef and poultry industries. The United States has banned Japanese beef imports after a recent foot and mouth scare over there so that could likely be a question. Also, any questions pertaining to the levels of food aid the United States gives to the international community will come up in this round. America’s farm subsidies are a controversial topic in the international community and since this is an election year the

issue is being revisited in some senate races in Kentucky and Washington. Therefore, extempers need to understand the subsidy issue and devise some solutions for making American subsidies more equitable and fair.

The Department of Interior has arguably the widest range of responsibilities of any other department in the U.S. government. It handles issues pertaining to Native Americans and to federal lands and administers conservation efforts. Any questions about endangered species and the economic development of federal lands will pop up here. Without an environmental topic, extempers should expect to see tons of questions about the Gulf oil spill here (and if it doesn't pop up here expect it to pop up in the Department of Homeland Security). Also, any questions pertaining to cap and trade legislation are likely to go here as well.

For energy, generic questions about alternative energy sources can be expected. Wind, solar, and nuclear power all have benefits for the United States, but there are valid criticisms against using each one. Any questions about America's continued oil dependence, which always work their way into CFL Nationals and are always talked about, will come up in this round. Extempers would be wise to research how much oil the United States gets from other nations and any up to date research on new energy technologies because judges will have heard all the generic "The U.S. is dependent on Middle Eastern oil!" analysis from the mainstream media. If you're interesting and present a new viewpoint your audience will be more receptive to you. Also, if you get any comparison questions about what form of alternative energy is best make sure that you address why the other energy sources are not as good. If you give a speech about why nuclear power is best but offer no comparisons with other energy sources then it is very difficult to see WHY it is better than other energy sources and you have merely changed your question into "Why is \_\_\_\_\_ form of energy good?"

On the transportation issue, one thing stands out: TOYOTA. In a year where the American car industry began to recover some of its footing, Toyota's acceleration problems could not have come up at a worse time. Congressmen are accusing the company of dragging its feet on investigating the causes of the acceleration and more Congressional inquiries are expected. A likely question here is going to ask you to assess the damage the acceleration problems have had on Toyota or what new regulations need to be imposed to prevent future automobile disasters like from happening again. The transportation topic area could also ask you how the United States could fix its crumbling infrastructure network and how more public transportation could be created within the country. Don't forget about the airline industry either.

#### *Practice Questions*

1. Which is the better alternative energy source for America: wind, solar, or nuclear?
2. Does America really need to reform its agricultural subsidies system?
3. How can the federal government get more money for national infrastructure projects?

#### **Topic Area #6: Education, Health & Human Services, Housing & Urban Development**

I feel like I am looking at an old enemy with this topic area. In last year's CFL topic area analysis I said that this was the worst topic area in the tournament and that it would likely be in semi-finals and finals. I wasn't disappointed as this ended up as the final round topic area. This year I think there is more material available which doesn't make this as difficult a round as it could be. I view this as a "what's wrong with America" round because our education system is lagging behind other countries, our healthcare system needs reform (although people disagree over what types of reform are appropriate), and the housing crash has devastated that ability of first time home buyers to get mortgages and led to foreclosures all over the country.

On education, extempers can expect questions about President Obama's "Race to the Top" funding, which is an attempt to encourage states to adjust their standards and make reforms. "Race to the Top" funding has caused some states' rights advocates to argue that the rights of the states are being usurped and that the federal government has no business in education. Out of this criticism could come questions about if the "Race to the Top" funds are working, if national standards should replace state standards for education, and what control the federal government should exercise over the education system. Arizona's ban on ethnic studies and Texas' move towards a more conservative school curriculum can be questioned in this round as well. Furthermore, the debates on teacher pay and if it should be based on merit can arise as well as if the nation needs more charter schools. Finally, a few questions on New Child Left Behind are bound to come up in this round. Don't forget about college as well where rising tuition costs are causing pundits to question if upward mobility is being stifled. My typical advice for education questions is to tread carefully. Your judges will be parents of students in the education system or teachers and you can't merely bash the system unless you have solutions and information to back you up. I might avoid questions about teachers unions because those are powder kegs when speaking before a national audience.

The healthcare reform bill will occupy much of the "Health and Human Services" aspect of this question. Questions about how much the healthcare reform bill will work, how much it will cost (and if that cost is sustainable), and what future reforms need to be made to the system will come up in this round. Also, questions about the rate of obesity in America, regulations on tobacco, and steps that the federal government has taken to prevent a wider outbreak of swine flu will be in this round. A question about prescription drug prices and if America should import drugs from other nations (and how it handles generic drugs) will matter. Finally, since Medicaid and Medicare are healthcare programs for the poor and elderly, expect to get questions about the sustainability of those programs and what reforms might have to be implemented in order to keep them alive.

For the housing and urban development aspect of the question you could get questions about improving inner city communities. However, most of your questions will concern the mortgage market and Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. The impact that potential financial reform could have on the mortgage industry will come into play and extempers should read up on the way the mortgage industry operates. Any questions about urban sprawl, which the department has said it wants to stop, will occur in this round.

If you get a question in this round that asks you to devise a plan of action (ex. your "how" questions), make sure that you take into consideration the political dynamics that would be necessary to pass it, especially if your question asks how Obama can get "x" policy passed. I've seen speeches where extempers totally ignore the political shifts and dynamics in Congress and it makes their solutions unbelievable and unrealistic. As I mentioned last year, it is possible you could get questions on stem cell research, abortion, and cloning in this round and if you do, tread carefully because you never know the political affiliations of your judges.

#### *Practice Questions*

1. Can the re-direction of funds through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program effectively help communities who have been devastated by the foreclosure crisis?
2. Will Obama's healthcare overhaul lead to lower insurance premiums?
3. Should merit pay become a national norm?

#### **Topic Area #7: Labor, Treasury, and Commerce**

This is the economics round of the tournament and in light of the economic recession this topic area will have tons of questions. If your file boxes just have a general "economy" folder and no subdivisions for the Federal Reserve, auto industry, financial reform ideas, unemployment, taxes, trade etc. then I would suggest subdividing that file before you get on the plane to go to Omaha. Extempers will also want to



know some crucial economic statistics before they go to Omaha: the growth rate in the U.S. economy in the last quarter, the unemployment rate, the underemployment rate, and trends on the American stock market.

Under the Obama administration, organized labor has had more input on public policy and the United Auto Workers (UAW) were able to gain more control over General Motors. With America's budget deficit rising (which is a place for another question in this round), the size of the public sector has come under fire from conservative commentators and the tea party movement. Since many public sector workers are unionized and have pensions that might be unsustainable decades from now, extempers should expect questions about whether the size of the federal government needs to be cut. Similarly, since the rate of private sector unionization remains low, extempers might be asked to explain this phenomenon or even provide a way for organized labor to gain new members. Craig Becker's recess appointment to the National Labor Relations Board received criticism from Republicans, who had refused to confirm him to the post, and reawakened a national debate on whether workers can unionize via "card check" instead of voting by secret ballot. Finally, the "labor" element of the question will focus on unemployment and ask you what the federal government should do to lower it, if 10% unemployment will become a new norm for the United States, and if the federal government should continue extending unemployment benefits.

Extempers will also be asked about America's trade relationships in this round. The U.S. still has pending free trade agreements with Panama and Colombia, which have languished because of Democrats unwillingness to ratify them due to labor and environmental concerns. Unlike President George W. Bush, Barack Obama does not enjoy fast track trade authority, meaning that he cannot conclude free trade agreements with other nations and submit them to Congress for an up or down vote. In the 2008 campaign, Obama said that he would re-evaluate NAFTA and although he has not done so, extempers might get a question about whether it's time to do so. The two biggest trade questions on the U.S. plate right now concern the Cuban embargo (which, if you don't get a question about it in the Americas round it will be here) and trade with the Chinese. Economic experts have argued that China is undervaluing its currency, the yuan, in order to boost exports. America has not called China a currency manipulator yet and extempers might be asked whether the time has come for America to do so.

Questions about financial regulation will come up in this round and what role the U.S. government should exercise in corporate governance. Issues dealing with executive pay, limitations on stock trading, etc. will come up in this round and extempers will have to be careful here. Keep in mind that economic speeches are not about how many statistics and numbers you can rattle off. While impressive, these numbers mean nothing unless they are put into a coherent narrative. Make sure that if you have to talk about hedge funds, derivatives, and any other financial instruments that you clearly explain what they do and how they impact the marketplace. Never assume that your audience knows this information because they likely do not.

In my opinion, illegal immigration will either be a topic area here or in the Homeland Security topic area. It might appear in both, with illegal immigration questions in this topic area having a more economic focus (i.e. "What impact has illegal immigration had on the American worker?" or "Are illegal immigrants a help or hindrance for the American economy) whereas Homeland Security questions might ask about what should be done to enhance American control along the US-Mexican border and whether Arizona's recent illegal immigration law is justified.

While most questions will center on national issues, extempers should not ignore the problems in state economies. Most of the states in the country are running deficits and are being forced to plug them with painful cuts. These cuts have caused a host of political problems in states like California and New York where cuts have impacted education and public sector employees. A generic "what is the state of the state

economies” question and more detailed questions about specific state economies, notably California, can emerge in this round.

Finally, a question about the economic stimulus package, the likelihood of President Obama being able to keep his pledge to not raise taxes on those making less than \$250,000 a year, and the possibility of the federal government implementing a VAT tax will work its way into this round.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Would the U.S. economy benefit from a smaller public sector?
2. Is the Federal Reserve waiting too long to raise interest rates?
3. Would the imposition of a VAT tax hinder America’s economic recovery?

### **Topic Area #8: Justice & the Supreme Court**

Can anyone say Elena Kagan? There will be several questions about Ms. Kagan in this round as it pertains to her upcoming confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court seat vacated by John Paul Stevens. Extempers need to have several things in their arsenal when addressing questions of this nature. First, extempers need to be aware of Ms. Kagan’s legal credentials (or lack thereof if you anticipate taking a negative stance when questions about her arise). Second, extempers need to have a knowledge of the history of Supreme Court confirmation hearings and understand the ideology of all of the justices on the Court. Finally, extempers need to have several other candidates in mind that President Obama could have named to the Court if he had not chosen Kagan. Since there is not a domestic politics round, extempers might run into questions about whether Obama’s pick of Kagan was politically wise and if the pick will help him or hurt him in the midterm elections in 2012.

Recent Supreme Court rulings in the Mojave cross case, its decision that giving juveniles life sentences without the possibility of parole is unconstitutional, and ruling the inmates who are ruled “sexually dangerous” can be detained past their prison terms could emerge in this round with extempers being asked whether the Supreme Court made the right ruling in those cases. Extempers might be asked about the detainment of terror suspects in this round as well, with the D.C. Court of Appeals recently deciding that enemy combatants at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan cannot challenge their detention. For any of these rounds, having a good background in constitutional law is very important. This doesn’t mean that you have to be a legal scholar but if you understand critical Supreme Court cases that are always looked to by the Court and your Bill of Rights you should be in good shape.

Some generic Supreme Court questions can also pop up in this round. The typical “Should *Roe v. Wade* be overturned?” or “Is lethal injection unconstitutional? (or the entire death penalty for that matter)” questions come to mind. Also, you might be asked about the Court’s future and if President Obama might get a third pick, which some have said could happen if Ruth Bader Ginsburg steps down next year. You might also see a question about the impact that Sonia Sotomayor has had thus far on the Court. Extempers might also be asked to identify the ideological bent of the Roberts Court on states’ rights, social issues, and the power of the federal government in national security matters. Extempers should keep future Supreme Court cases in mind in regards to constitutional challenges to Obama’s healthcare legislation and the constitutionality of Chicago’s handgun ban (which the Court will issue a decision on later this year) in mind because these could be turned into questions.

Also, the “justice” part of the topic can address criminal issues. President Obama has signaled a willingness to look into the expansion of the federal government’s DNA database, which has worried privacy advocates. Also, any issues pertaining to police brutality (i.e. the controversial Detroit police shooting) and the treatment of prisoners will be in this round.

### *Practice Questions*

1. Will the Supreme Court find Chicago's handgun ban unconstitutional?
2. Are police departments dealing with incidents of police brutality better than they did a decade ago?
3. Will Elena Kagan be a boon for the Supreme Court's liberal wing?

### **Topic Area #9: Homeland Security, Defense, Veterans Affairs**

In last year's CFL topic area analysis I said that homeland security was becoming an archaic topic. The 2009-2010 season rejuvenated the homeland security topic thanks to the underwear bomber in December and the attempted car bombing in New York City earlier this month. Of all of the topic areas, this is one where extempers will most likely get a question about the competency of the officials in charge of various departments. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano has come under fire for her responses to these incidents as well as her inaction on the Gulf oil spill and conservative pundits question whether Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who is one of two Republicans in Obama's cabinet, has gone soft on defense.

Extempers can still expect to get generic national security questions that have been around for years in regards to the Patriot Act, national ID cards, and the rights of terror suspects (if it doesn't pop up in the justice topic area). Since the underwear bomber incident there has been a renewed focus on airline security and the introduction of full body scanners into airports has been a major privacy issue for the last six months. Furthermore, illegal immigration could come up in this topic area as it relates to border security and even comprehensive immigration reform. A question about what the proper role of the states in regulating immigration is plausible in this round.

The resignation of Dennis Blair as the National Intelligence Director is an issue that extempers should keep an eye on. Reports have said that Blair's resignation was because of frustration with some of the political battles within the Obama administration and how Attorney General Eric Holder has exercised more control over intelligence issues. Questions can arise about the current state of America's intelligence apparatus, what Blair's resignation signals about the state of U.S. intelligence, and who should replace him.

On the defense side of this topic area, America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq will likely be topics. America is continuing its troop withdrawals from Iraq despite an uptick in violence and despite no Iraqi government being formed after March elections. Obama's recent suggestion that foreign policy needs to be built more on diplomacy than the use of force is something to keep in mind when addressing these questions. The shift of missile defense bases out of Eastern Europe earlier in the year is something to consider for a question in this round as well (as well as the reliability or usefulness of such a system in the first place). Secretary Gates has also placed an emphasis on smarter spending within the Defense Department and some projects like the F-35 combat aircraft and new ballistic missile submarines are said to be on the chopping block.

For veterans affairs, extempers should be prepared for questions about how well America is caring for veterans of the war on terrorism. Media reports show that veterans care about their healthcare and education benefits and want the government to do more to protect those benefits. Also, the Department of Veterans Affairs has voiced concern that its computer networks are vulnerable to cyber attacks (which independently is an issue for the defense part of this topic as well).

### *Practice Questions*

1. Does Dennis Blair's resignation signal that the position of National Intelligence Director needs to be overhauled?
2. Should Janet Napolitano resign?

3. After over a year in office, what grade do Barack Obama's national security policies deserve?