AMERICAN SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION

# 2026-2027
# Lincoln-Douglas Debate
# Sourcebook Case 1

**When in conflict, our obligations to future generations ought to be valued above our obligations to our own generation.**

ASDA

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# Affirmative Case: Fairness

Every generation inherits a world shaped by the choices of those who came before it. The decisions we make today will not only affect our lives, but also the lives of people who will live after us. Although we have undeniable responsibilities to our own generation, we should not ignore the needs of future generations simply because we will not be around to experience the consequences ourselves. When these responsibilities come into conflict, we should give greater priority to the people who will inherit the future we create. For these reasons, I affirm today's resolution:

**When in conflict, our obligations to future generations ought to be valued above our obligations to our own generation.**

## Definitions

First, I would like to provide some definitions to clarify the terms in this debate.

**Definition 1: Obligation:** "Something one is bound to do."[1] (Mirriam-Webster )

**Definition 2: Future generations:** "The people who will be born in future within a society."[2] (Cambridge)

Our own generation refers to the people living today.

Essentially, this resolution asks us whether we should prioritize future generations over our own when we cannot fully meet the needs of both.

## Value: Fairness

My value is Fairness, which means giving proper consideration to the interests of those affected by our decisions.

## Criterion: Considering Everyone Affected

My criterion is considering everyone affected. When making decisions, we should consider not only the immediate benefits to ourselves, but also the effects our choices will have on the future.

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[1] 1. Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "obligation," accessed October 15, 2026, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/obligation.

[2] Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. "future generation," accessed October 15, 2026, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/future-generation

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## Contention 1: Our decisions affect future generations

The first reason we should prioritize future generations is that our decisions have consequences beyond our own lifetimes. For example, the way we use natural resources and care for the environment can affect the opportunities available to people in the future. If we use resources irresponsibly today, future generations may have fewer resources to meet their own needs.

UNESCO's 1997 *Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations* states that "the fate of future generations depends to a great extent on decisions and actions taken today."[3]

This shows that our responsibility does not end with our own generation. Since our choices have lasting consequences, we should consider the people who will experience them. It would be unfair to focus only on what benefits us now while ignoring the problems our decisions may create for others.

## Contention 2: Future generations cannot participate in our decisions

My second contention is that future generations have no opportunity to influence the decisions that will affect their lives. They cannot vote in our elections, speak at our public meetings, or tell us what they need. Yet they will still have to live with the consequences of our choices.

The United Nations' 2024 *Declaration on Future Generations* recognizes that "the decisions, actions and inactions of present generations have an intergenerational multiplier effect, and therefore resolving to ensure that present generations act with responsibility towards safeguarding the needs and interests of future generations."[4]

Our generation has the ability to make decisions on their behalf, even if we do not directly represent them. This gives us a responsibility to consider their interests rather than focusing only on our own. Just because future generations cannot speak for themselves does not mean their needs are less important.

## Contention 3: We should leave future generations a better future

Finally, we should be willing to think beyond our own immediate interests. Many of the opportunities we enjoy today exist because previous generations built, protected, or preserved things for us.

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[3] "Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards." *UNESCO Legal Affairs*. November 12, 1997. https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/declaration-responsibilities-present-generations-towards-future-generations.

[4] "Declaration on Future Generations | Pact for the Future." *United Nations*. United Nations. September 22 and 23, 2024. https://www.un.org/pact-for-the-future/en/declaration-future-generations?

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For example, the U.S. highway system connects cities and makes it easier for people and goods to travel across the country. The people who designed and built it created something that

continues to benefit people today, even generations later. In the same way, we benefit from decisions made by previous generations, and we have a responsibility to make choices that will benefit those who come after us, even if we never get to experience the results ourselves.

The United Nations' 1987 report *Our Common Future* states that "the time has come to take the decisions needed to secure the resources to sustain this and coming generations"[5]

We need to make responsible decisions today to protect the future. When our generation's short-term interests conflict with the long-term needs of future generations, we should be willing to make sacrifices to ensure they have the resources and opportunities they need.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, we cannot make decisions based only on what benefits us today. Our choices will shape the world that future generations inherit, and they deserve to have their interests considered. We have the opportunity to make responsible choices now, while future generations will have to live with the results. When our obligations conflict, fairness requires us to give greater priority to those who will inherit the consequences of our decisions. For these reasons, I affirm the resolution.

[5] "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future." *The World Commission on Environment and Development.* March 20, 1987. http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf.

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