**Format**: Student Congress

**Debate Structure / Timing and Summary:**

Debate on each legislation starts with a speech introducing it to the chamber, called an **authorship** if it’s delivered by the student (or member of a team if the legislation is submitted by a school), or **sponsorship** if delivered by a student from a different school. This first speech on each legislation is always followed by a two-minute questioning period. Questions and answers are timed continuously (the clock does not stop) once the first questioner is recognized. Also, the National Speech & Debate Association requires a two-minute questioning period for the first negative speaker on each legislation. After the introductory speech for each legislation, students deliver alternating negative and affirmative speeches. Each of these speeches allows a maximum of three minutes, with a one-minute questioning period (National Speech & Debate Association rules) or balance of unused speaking time (NCFL rules and some states). If a speech is particularly controversial, a member may move to suspend the rules to extend questioning for an individual speaker, but this should be done with restraint.

**Tips / “things” to do:**

1. Bring an open mind to the debate. In many cases, the students wrote the bills upon which they will be speaking. They probably have strong feelings about the topic.
2. Take notes during the debate keep track of new ideas, new information, new refutations, new strategies. These are all ways to help differentiate the many speakers you will hear.
3. Your comments will help the debaters improve and also reinforce what they are doing well

**“Things” to look for:**

Speeches should be delivered extemporaneously, which means spoken spontaneously based on an outline of notes, rather than recited word-for-word from a manuscript.

Develop specific arguments that refute (argue against) the opposition and introduce new ideas and perspectives rebuilding his/her own side of debate, rather than simply repeating ideas shared by speakers on the same side, or ignoring points raised by the opposing side.

In refuting, speakers should refer to specific arguments made by peers and never attack the individual (ad hominem fallacy). Be kind, generous and gracious with remarks, for example: “While Sen. Smith’s argument to close the military base is well-intentioned…”

Effective speeches that respond to other arguments made on legislation come as a result of critical listening and taking notes—called flowing. Keeping track of arguments made on both the affirmative and negative sides, and any proof or evidence that may be questionable, is the only way to keep debate dynamic or interactive.

Questions usually are not scored by judges, but how well speakers answer is scored. Answering questions well shows a judge the speaker can defend his/her arguments and has sound knowledge of the topic. When answering, it’s best to succinctly answer just the question—no more, no less.

You may keep track of the number of questions each student asks in the event you feel this may help you “break a tie” between two speakers.

**“Things” not to do:**

1. Do not impose upon the debate your particular preferences for how a given side of the resolution/bill should be debated or or supported or voted down. Be objective.
2. Do not interact with the students during the debate – other than to acknowledge them when they ask you to let them know when you are ready. Take notes and all comments go on the ballot.
3. The SPDL League is not a place for oral critiques. This is truly a teaching league and all comments need to go on the ballot.

**Language to use on ballot:**

Try to be complimentary toward every speaker – it’s not easy to get up and speak in front of a room full of your peers and some adults you may or may not know.

If you have something critical to write, be specific about the issue. Be critical of the argument, not the speaker or their ideals.

**Language not to use on ballot:**

Do not be silly and comment upon anything that has nothing to do with the debate at hand – all comments should be focused on what you witnessed

**Overall:** 

