Debate Assignment

On Wednesday, February 16, the class will participate in oral debates on the following resolution, as recommended by the League for Programming Freedom:

**Resolved:** That Congress should pass legislation abolishing all patent protection for software.

You should imagine that the debates have been organized by the Congressional Research Service and that your audience is composed of congressional staff members who will be advising their bosses on policy decisions. Thus, the debates will be judged primarily on the cogency and relevancy of your arguments rather than on technical debating skill. As in a traditional debate, however, the affirmative side has the burden of proving its case; the negative must simply refute the resolution and need not propose any action on its own.

Each debate will occur between two 2-member teams (perhaps with one or two three-person teams as needed) and will proceed according to the following model, which was used (with longer time periods) for the Lincoln-Douglas debates:

- 4 mins. opening statement from affirmative side
- 6 mins. opening statement from negative side
- 2 mins. first rebuttal by affirmative
- 4 mins. rebuttal by negative
- 4 mins. final rebuttal by affirmative

For the opening statement, the time may be used by one team member, or the time may be split between statements by both team members. Similarly for the rebuttals, either a single team member or both may present. However, both team members must present at least once during the debate.

You are free to use any materials or format you like for your side’s presentation. There will be an overhead projector in each of the debate rooms, and you are encouraged to make transparencies if doing so would make it easier for you to illustrate your argument. You may not, however, use computer projection (such as PowerPoint slides). While there is no doubt that using such tools can improve the quality of a presentation, the setup time and the likelihood of encountering technical problems make it dangerous—as past experience bears out—to allow their use in a situation with tight time constraints.

The debates will be scheduled in class on Wednesday as well as at some other class period. You will be assigned a time according to the availability you list on the cards you fill out in class and will be randomly assigned to argue either the affirmative or negative side. Each 50-minute session will consist of two 20-minute debates. You are required to attend both debates during your own session so that every debate has an audience.