

HMDC Presents...

WORLD SCHOOLS · UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY · SEPTEMBER 2026

The Background

THE MOTION

‘This House would welcome climate pessimism.’

WHAT THE MOTION ACTUALLY ASKS

Pessimism here means accepting that some harm can no longer be prevented.

It does not mean claiming everything is destroyed, and it does not mean giving up.

The information slide is binding, so we read it before we write anything.

It defines climate pessimism as the view that catastrophic heating cannot be fully prevented.

The question is whether accepting that leads to better decisions.

Not whether the science is bleak. Both sides agree on the science.

WHAT EACH SIDE HAS TO PROVE

Proposition: facing the harm changes what we do.

Money for preparing, sea walls, and honest planning follow from accepting what is coming.

Opposition: hope is what still moves people.

Despair now stops more people acting than doubt about the science does.

Neither side wins by describing the weather.

The round is decided by which outlook produces the better decisions from here.

THE TRAP IN THIS MOTION

If the Opposition define pessimism as giving up, the Proposition has lost.

The Proposition must fix the definition in the first minute and hold it all round.

If the Proposition claim nothing can be done, the Opposition has won.

Accepting some harm is not the same as accepting all of it, and the difference is the case.

This debate is about what we do next, not about how bad the science is.

The team that keeps the round on decisions, and off describing disasters, is the team the judge follows.

The Proposition Case

THE MOTION

‘This House would welcome climate pessimism.’

WHAT WE HAVE TO PROVE

That some harm can no longer be prevented.

This is reading the science, not despairing of it.

That accepting it changes what gets funded.

Sea walls, warning systems and honest planning follow from acceptance.

That hope has been costing people already.

Preparation was deprioritised while the world told itself prevention would be enough.

Proposition

We argue that welcoming climate pessimism is desirable, because a world that accepts what can no longer be prevented finally starts preparing for it.

1 The money rich countries gave poorer countries to prepare for damage fell from 27.9 to 25.9 billion dollars.

Carbon Brief, October 29 2025.

They will answer... That the total is still large. We reply that it fell in the year the damage grew.

2 Preparing for damage was deprioritised on purpose, in favour of preventing it.

Grantham Research Institute, London School of Economics, August 14 2024.

They will answer... That both can be funded. We reply that for thirty years only one of them was.

3 The warming that has already happened has caused dangerous and widespread losses.

United Nations Climate Change, Last Accessed: August 2026.

They will answer... That worse can still be stopped. We agree, and say the losses already here still need planning for.

4 West Antarctic ice melting is projected in every scenario, including the most ambitious Paris target.

Nature Climate Change, October 23 2023.

They will answer... That other systems still respond. We reply that this one does not, and the coasts are real.

5 Naming despair as a delay tactic cuts both ways, because promising future technology is also on the list.

Global Sustainability, July 1 2020.

They will answer... That doomism delays action. We reply that the same paper names optimism about distant fixes as delay too.

Our strongest ground is the money.

Preparation funding fell in the same year the damage rose. That is hope making a decision, and the people who drown because the sea wall was never built are the cost of it.

The Opposition Case

THE MOTION

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WHAT WE HAVE TO PROVE

That effort still changes the outcome.

Every fraction of a degree prevented is harm that never reaches anyone.

That the tools are working now.

The cheapest new power on earth is already the clean kind.

That despair stops people acting.

It is now a bigger obstacle than doubt about the science.

Opposition

We argue that welcoming climate pessimism is undesirable, because the belief that nothing can be done is now the largest single reason people stop trying.

- 1

Harm grows with every increment of warming, so every fraction we prevent is harm that never happens.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, March 21 2023.

They will answer... That some harm is locked in. We agree, and say that is an argument for effort, not against it.
- 2

Solar power is about 41 percent cheaper than the lowest-cost fossil alternative, and onshore wind 53 percent.

International Renewable Energy Agency, July 22 2025.

They will answer... That finance costs differ by region. We reply that the technology got cheaper anyway.
- 3

The largest emitter has held its carbon dioxide flat or falling for twenty-one months.

Carbon Brief, February 12 2026.

They will answer... That it may rise again. We say flat, never peaked, because the source says so itself.
- 4

More people now refuse to act because they think nothing can be done than because they doubt the science.

Frontiers in Communication, May 3 2024.

They will answer... That despair can be realistic. We reply that it is now the largest single obstacle left.
- 5

Saying it is already too late is one of four recognised ways that climate action gets delayed.

Global Sustainability, July 1 2020.

They will answer... That the same paper lists other delays. We reply that welcoming one of them is still welcoming delay.

Our strongest ground is that despair has overtaken denial.

The thing our opponents want us to welcome is already the main reason people do nothing, and researchers have given it a name and put it on a list of delay tactics.

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WHAT THE DEBATE IS ABOUT

Pessimism means accepting that some harm can no longer be prevented.

It does not mean giving up, and both sides must agree on that before they argue.

The Proposition must show that accepting this leads to better choices.

It does not have to prove that everything is already destroyed.

The Opposition must show that hope still changes what people do.

It argues that despair is now the bigger reason people stop acting.

Proposition

The side that argues welcoming climate pessimism is desirable, because facing the harm changes what we do.

Money for preparing for damage fell from 27.9 to 25.9 billion dollars.

Carbon Brief, October 29 2025.

Preparing for damage was deprioritised on purpose, in favour of prevention.

Grantham Research Institute, London School of Economics, August 14 2024.

Warming of 1.1 degrees has already caused widespread losses.

United Nations Climate Change, Last Accessed: August 2026.

Antarctic melting is projected in every scenario, including the most ambitious.

Nature Climate Change, October 23 2023.

Opposition

The side that argues welcoming climate pessimism is undesirable, because hopelessness stops people acting.

Harm escalates with every increment of warming, so every fraction we stop still counts.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, March 21 2023.

Solar power is 41 percent cheaper than the lowest-cost fossil alternative.

International Renewable Energy Agency, July 22 2025.

The largest emitter has been flat or falling for 21 months.

Carbon Brief, February 12 2026.

More people now refuse to act from hopelessness than from doubt.

Frontiers in Communication, May 3 2024.

Both sides are supported by serious institutions, so the debate is decided by who shows the larger harm.

We must understand both sides, because we will argue for each one during the tournament.