

CLIMATE PESSIMISM - BOTH SIDES

World Schools, Round Five, prepared • University of Kentucky (Sept 11-13)

HMDC Forensics Team (Grades 3-6)

World Schools, Round Five, prepared. This House welcomes climate pessimism. Information slide, binding: Climate pessimism is the viewpoint that catastrophic global heating and severe ecological breakdown cannot be fully prevented, and that we should make decisions based on this fact. HMDC Forensics Team

BEFORE THE ARGUMENTS

Neither side disputes the science, and a team that spends time doing so has wasted a speech. What separates the sides is whether taking this outlook as our starting point produces desirable decisions.

Every argument below therefore names a decision rather than a feeling, because that is the only way a judge can weigh one side against the other.

PROPOSITION - WE WELCOME IT

1. Preparing costs less than pretending.

We claim that admitting some damage is unavoidable is what finally moves money toward preparing for it.

This holds because governments fund what they believe is coming. While the official position is that catastrophe can still be avoided, spending on defences looks like giving up, so it keeps losing to spending on prevention.

Our evidence is Carbon Brief in October 2025, reporting the United Nations Adaptation Gap Report, which notes that developed countries agreed under the Paris Agreement to balance the money raised for cutting emissions with the money raised for adaptation, and that more has gone to cutting emissions. Adaptation finance to developing countries was 25.9 billion dollars in 2023, down from 27.9 billion the year before.

Expect this answer: that adaptation is underfunded because of politics rather than optimism. Our reply is that the London School of Economics describes adaptation as historically deprioritised in favour of prevention, which is a statement about what the world believed was worth funding.

2. Paying for harm nobody can stop.

We claim the world already agrees with us, because it built an institution on exactly this premise.

This holds because the loss and damage fund exists to pay for harm that neither prevention nor preparation avoided. Creating it required governments to accept that some outcomes are settled.

Our evidence is the United Nations, quoting Dr. Adelle Thomas, a lead author of the IPCC report on impacts and adaptation, who states that losses and damages are not preventable because a level of warming is already locked in.

Expect this answer: that accepting some unavoidable harm is not the same as adopting pessimism as our whole decision rule. Our reply is that the fund only became possible once that acceptance arrived, so the outlook did the work.

3. Moving people before the water does.

We claim that communities only relocate once permanence is admitted, and that relocating early is far less costly than relocating after a disaster.

This holds because as long as a coastline is believed defensible, money goes into defending it. Retreat is never chosen while hope remains.

Our evidence is Tayanah O'Donnell of the Australian National University, writing in a Royal Society journal in 2022, who argues that not all locations can be saved by protecting or accommodating, and that retreat is a difficult but necessary conversation.

Expect this answer: that retreat destroys communities and should be a last resort. Our reply is that the same paper distinguishes retreat planned before an event from retreat managed after one, and only the first is a choice.

4. Passing a threshold already.

We claim this is no longer a prediction, because a tipping point has been reported as crossed.

This holds because policy built on the assumption that thresholds are still ahead of us gives the incorrect answer once one is behind us.

Our evidence is the Stockholm Resilience Centre in October 2025, reporting the Global Tipping Points Report written by one hundred and sixty scientists, which finds that warm-water coral reefs, on which nearly a billion people depend, are now passing their tipping point and that widespread dieback is occurring.

Expect this answer: that the same report says refuges may survive and must be protected, which is a call to act rather than to accept. Our reply is that protecting refuges is itself a decision that only makes sense once the wider loss is accepted.

5. Licensing delay through optimism.

We claim that the cheerful framing has already cost the world a decade.

This holds because a promise to remove carbon later reduces the pressure to stop emitting now, and the removal technology remains largely unbuilt.

Our evidence is three senior climate scientists in The Conversation in 2021, including a former chair of the IPCC, who write that the idea of net zero has licensed a recklessly cavalier burn now, pay later approach while emissions continued to soar.

Expect this answer: that the fix is honest optimism rather than pessimism. Our reply is that the authors are describing what optimism did in practice, not what a better optimism might have done in theory.

OPPOSITION - WE DO NOT WELCOME IT

1. Winning every fraction of a degree.

We claim that the motion's own wording defeats it, because not fully prevented is not the same as fixed.

This holds because if harm rises steadily with warming, then every tenth of a degree we prevent is harm we prevented, and there is never a point at which effort stops paying.

Our evidence is the IPCC in 2023, stating that risks and adverse impacts escalate with every increment of global warming, and that they are higher at 2 degrees than at 1.5.

Expect this answer: that we can believe both things at once. Our reply is that the slide does not ask us to believe both, it asks us to decide on the basis of one, and deciding on that basis is what removes the urgency.

2. Building the cheapest power ever.

We claim that prevention is working better than the motion assumes.

This holds because the main obstacle to cutting emissions was always cost, and that obstacle has largely gone.

Our evidence is the International Renewable Energy Agency in July 2025, reporting that in 2024 solar was on average 41 percent cheaper than the cheapest fossil alternative and onshore wind was 53 percent cheaper.

Expect this answer: that cheap power has not cut emissions fast enough. Our reply is that it has begun to, which is the next argument.

3. Flattening the largest emitter.

We claim the trend has already turned in the country that matters most.

This holds because China produces more emissions than any other country, so its direction of travel largely decides the global figure.

Our evidence is Carbon Brief in February 2026, reporting that clean power generation has grown faster than demand since 2023, which is why China's emissions have been stable or falling since early 2024.

Expect this answer: that flat is not falling fast enough. Our reply is that the motion asks us to decide as though prevention has failed, and prevention plainly has not failed where it was tried hardest.

4. Freezing people into inaction.

We claim that believing an outcome is beyond our control stops people acting, and that this is the predictable result of the outlook the motion welcomes.

This holds because effort requires a belief that effort matters.

Our evidence is researchers at Sapienza University of Rome in 2024, who describe climate change helplessness as the belief that climate change is beyond personal control, resulting in behavioral inhibition, and who note that telling people what to do instead increases their belief that action works.

Expect this answer: that adults can hold a bleak view and still act. Our reply is that the research measures what people actually do rather than what they could in principle do.

5. Overtaking the deniers.

We claim that this outlook is now a larger obstacle to action than denial itself.

This holds because a person who thinks the problem is unsolvable and a person who thinks it is not real vote the same way and do the same nothing.

Our evidence is researchers at the University of British Columbia in 2024, who report that more people opposed action because of doomist beliefs than opposed it due to skepticism, and that more believed humans cannot address global warming than denied its existence.

Expect this answer: that these people are simply reading the science correctly. Our reply is that peer-reviewed work in Global Sustainability files this family of arguments among the recognised discourses of climate delay, under the heading Surrender.

6. Serving the people who profit.

We claim that somebody benefits when the public gives up, and it is not the public.

This holds because a company selling fossil fuels does not need people to doubt the science if it can persuade them that nothing can be done.

Our evidence is Michael Mann of the University of Pennsylvania, speaking at the Harvard Kennedy School in 2024, who says he pushes back on doomism because it is not justified by the science and potentially leads down a path of inaction.

Expect this answer: that naming who benefits is not an argument about whether the outlook is correct. Our reply is that the motion asks whether we welcome it, and an outlook whose main effect is to protect the largest emitters is not one we welcome.

THE SENTENCE THAT CARRIES EACH SIDE

For Proposition: the world already built a fund for harm it admits it cannot prevent, and the moment it made that admission, money and people finally started moving to where the damage will actually land.

For Opposition: the motion says catastrophe cannot be fully prevented, and the word fully gives the whole case away, because harm rises with every increment, which means there is no degree of warming at which giving up becomes the sensible choice.

A NOTE FOR US AS A TEAM

We keep this at the level of what governments decide. If the topic sits heavily with anyone, come and talk to me rather than carrying it quietly.