Here are some differences judges noticed between in-person and online student congress during the 2020 National Speech & Debate Association National Congress Tournament:

- SMALLER CHAMBERS: Congress rooms will probably be smaller - think 13-15 in a chamber. Accommodating 20+ in a single online meeting is a logistical bugbear.

- TEST THE SYSTEM: Competitors and judges are encouraged to go into their online chambers early to verify that audio/visual equipment is functioning. This is also a good time to discuss who will preside over a session and what docket to use.

- NO, SERIOUSLY - TEST THE SYSTEM: We implore all interested Congress students to get acclimated to the platform before going into chamber for the first time. That way, you don't need to find things out on the fly. Please be patient. This is a quaint kerfuffle that we have found ourselves in, and it will take some getting used to just like every other aspect of life in a post-Covid world.

- SET YOUR NAME CORRECTLY: Tournament rules may require you to keep your camera on and change your online naming convention to match certain requirements. Please remember these rules and comply accordingly. At Nationals, competitors labeled themselves by their codes. This made it easier for judges to find and score their ballot. (Judges labeled themselves by their codes, too.)

- BE NATURAL: Be mindful of the background. Tournament rules often forbid anything besides solid colors behind competitors.

- FIND A QUIET PLACE: We recommend finding as quiet of a room as possible when competing.

- THINGS HAPPEN: Expect technical blunders to occur regardless of prior checks. Judges and tournament staff will work sedulously to help resolve such issues. Technical issues occur the most when multiple students are interacting at once. Good to minimize those situations whenever possible - one idea being to preset dockets.

- MORE THINGS HAPPEN: Be cognizant of scheduling delays. Hosting hundreds of students into online sessions is cumbersome. It is entirely possible (especially given the novel situation we find ourselves in) that tournament start times will be delayed due to technical bugs and lag.

- MUTE THE MIC: Remember to mute your microphone when others are giving their speeches. Nothing is more irksome than hearing background noise while others are speaking. Judges may reflect their ire in their rankings.

- SPEAK CLEARLY: Not all audio mics are made equally, so remember to speak as clearly as possible.

- YOU'RE ON CAMERA: As a result of poor internet connection, students may need to turn their cameras off in order to be heard by the chamber.

- RECENCY: Oftentimes, recency charts will be randomly generated and shared with the PO before the round starts. So, when two or more speakers stand up with an equal number of speeches already given, the PO will choose the next speaker according to the chart.

- NO MORE GAVELING: Gavel taps are no more. Expect time signals (like in speech rounds) and remember to pin the PO who will be giving them to your screen, so you can see him/her while you speak and don't end up going over time.

- PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES: Expect to use the emotes and "yes" and "no" buttons in place of standing up to vote for procedures, legislation, etc. You can also use name placards to indicate interest in asking questions, etc. We noticed Presiding Officers having difficulties occasionally noticing all potential speakers, questioners, and students looking to make motions.

- PIN THE JUDGES: Along with pinning the PO to the screen, competitors may want to pin their judges to the screen to ensure they're actually ready for them to begin speaking. Judges may want to audibly announce their readiness to the chamber, since video can be laggy at times.

- RECESS: Every chamber we judged had a 5-10 minute recess midway through the session. We urge judges and POs to make this recess mandatory for every session of Congress (even though it's not a CFL standard), because it may limit excessive personal privilege motions - and frankly, it was just nice to be able to rest as a judge for a few moments.