The 2020 Presidential Debates

The Commission on Presidential Debates
Belmont University
Nashville, Tennessee
The Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD) was established in 1987 after two formal studies recommended the creation of a permanent, independent general election debate sponsor. Its primary purpose is to sponsor and produce debates for the United States presidential and vice presidential candidates and to undertake research and educational activities relating to the debates. The organization, which is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) corporation, has sponsored all of the presidential debates since 1988.

Co-Chairs
Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr.
Dorothy S. Ridings
Kenneth Wollack

Honorary Co-Chairs
Gerald R. Ford*
Jimmy Carter
Ronald Reagan*
George W. Bush
Barack Obama

Co-Chair Emeritus
Paul G. Kirk, Jr.

Board of Directors
John C. Danforth
Charles Gibson
John Griffen
Yvonne Hao
Jane Harman
Antonia Hernandez
Reverend John I. Jenkins
Newton N. Minow
Richard D. Parsons
Olympia Snowe

Executive Director
Janet H. Brown

Chief of Staff
Robin Goldman

* Deceased
The Commission on Presidential Debates

National Sponsors

The following national sponsors have generously contributed to the 2020 presidential debates:

Anheuser-Busch Companies

Judy and Peter Blum Kovler Foundation

Crowell & Moring LLP
United Airlines, Inc.
Pentagram
State and Federal Communications, Inc.

The Commission on Presidential Debates owes special thanks to:

Kristen Welker
Co-Anchor Weekend TODAY
White House Correspondent, NBC News

Dr. Frank Newport
Senior Scientist, Gallup

National Press Club

United States Secret Service

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Department of Homeland Security
The Clemson University Media Forensics Hub
As a two-time presidential debate host site, Belmont University is honored to welcome the candidates, campaign staff, media and other special guests to our campus for the final debate of the 2020 election cycle. In 2008, Belmont became the home to the first presidential debate to ever be hosted in Tennessee when then Senators Barack Obama and John McCain participated in the Town Hall Presidential Debate in the University’s Curb Event Center.

Founded 130 years ago by two female schoolteachers, Belmont University sits on 93 historic acres two miles southwest of downtown Nashville. Its 8,400 students hail from every state and more than 36 countries and are drawn to Belmont to be challenged by the confluence of liberal arts and professional education in a Christian community of learning and service. The University’s purpose is to help students explore their passions and develop their talents to meet the world’s needs. With more than 95 areas of undergraduate study, more than 25 master’s programs and five doctoral degrees, there is no limit to the ways Belmont University can expand an individual’s horizon.

**Campus Growth & Academic Accomplishments**

Over the past two decades Belmont has experienced phenomenal growth in its enrollment, physical footprint and academic offerings. Since 2000, the University has grown from just under 3,000 students to more than 8,400 in recent years. The campus itself also expanded significantly with more than $890 million in additions and renovations and is currently in the midst of three construction projects: a 1,700-seat performing arts center, an 830-space parking garage/tennis court structure and an athletic practice facility.

Academically, the University has added numerous interdisciplinary programs, including new majors in Data Science, Public Health, Faith & Social Justice, Hospitality & Tourism Management and Architecture, among others.

But Belmont isn’t simply growing... the University is growing successfully, creating strong programs that serve students’ needs. For 12 years in a row Belmont has been recognized in U.S. News by its peers for its innovative approach to higher education, and in 2020, was named among the top 20 schools in the nation for its “strong commitment to undergraduate teaching.” In addition, Belmont is consistently recognized by Billboard as a Top School for Music Business, and the University’s nine-year-old College of Law recently posted the sixth highest bar passage rate in the nation for first-time test takers. A haven for self-starters and creative thinkers, Belmont is also home to a Top 20 ranked undergraduate entrepreneurship program. Best of all, the
University is helping students achieve their dreams, boasting a 93% rate of placing students in jobs, graduate school or military service within six months of graduation.

**National Attention & Civic Responsibility**

It’s often said that Belmont University is different by design, a unicorn of sorts in higher ed. When opportunity comes knocking, Belmont eagerly opens the door. This campus is known for consistently pursuing ways to defy the status quo and provide students—and the community at large—with phenomenal learning experiences.

The past 24 months are a tremendous example of what sets Belmont apart as the University acquired two world-class colleges of art and design, hosted an international Davis Cup tennis competition and served twice as the venue for the nationally broadcast “CMA Country Christmas” special. Nearly 800 Belmont students put their talents on display every year on the annual PBS broadcast of “Christmas at Belmont,” and the University served last year as a major sponsor of Ken Burns’ recent documentary on “Country Music.” Plus, we’ve recently partnered with alumnus Brad Paisley on a new nonprofit free grocery store to serve the hungry in our community.

Belmont’s desire to contribute to the democratic process through civic-minded community service also means this campus frequently hosts debates and critical conversations on local, state and national issues. Woven into the fabric of the Belmont experience is the concept that each individual’s greatest privilege is having the health, ability and resources to serve someone else, and our entire campus is extremely proud to serve this year by hosting the final 2020 Presidential Debate. Moreover, this opportunity offers us another means of fulfilling our mission to educate students “to engage with and transform the world.” Under the overarching theme “The Ideas of America,” our faculty will lead programming that tackles the critical issues facing our nation and the world, promoting exceptional educational experiences to benefit our students and all of Middle Tennessee.

We are thankful for the support of the state of Tennessee, the city of Nashville, our campus community, our volunteers and, of course, our debate sponsors in making this evening’s event possible.
Executive Producer
Martin Slutsky

Co-Executive Producer
Tammy Johnston

Producer
Rory Davies

Associate Producer
Moira Kelly

Campaign Liaison & International Projects
Matt Dippell

Special Projects & Debate Hall Logistics
Jean Cantrell, Director
Daniel Felton, Deputy Director
David James, Deputy Director
Elizabeth Loudy, Assistant House Manager
Eric Felton, Assistant House Manager

Operations and Logistics
Aya Estrin, Director
Louisa Keil, Production Coordinator
Allison Bishop, Coordinator

Senior Advisor
Peter Eyre

Director of Security
Robert O’Donnell

Chief Information Security Officer
VJ Rao

Technical Services
Shipley Landiss, Senior Technical Manager
Larry Boshers, Technical Manager

Media
Shelby Sundling, Director
Blanca Margarita Sanchez, Deputy Director
Jeff Kent, Still Photographer Liaison
Hope Wigginton, Communications & Research Coordinator
Betsy Arseneau, Manager

CPD Photographer
Mark Abraham
Pool coverage of the October 22, 2020 debate provided by Fox News and CBS News Radio.
Special thanks to Herman Miller for providing the Aeron Chair seating onstage.
The Commission on Presidential Debates

Professional Services

Lewis K. Loss, Esq.
Dykema Gossett PLLC

Steven Adair, Sean Koessel
Volexity, LLC

Morgan | Wingate P.C.

Grace Guggenheim
Guggenheim Productions Inc.

Spectrum Printing & Graphics

Stephen Harty

Netskout Systems, Inc.

Wheels Up

Cleveland Clinic

Gramercy Tech
DebateWatch2020

In 1992, the CPD organized focus groups around the U.S. to watch the debates, turn them off immediately after they ended and discuss what people had learned. The focus group participants unanimously said how valuable it was to talk about the debates in a civil way without being dismissed or criticized by those with different views. Thus was born DebateWatch, a voter education program established in 1996 which we have reinvigorated in 2020. DebateWatch is designed to bring people together to watch a debate, then turn it off at the end — before media commentary — and discuss what they saw and heard. Hosting a DebateWatch provides a communal viewing experience for participants. The goal is not to say who won or lost, it is to share views with those who may agree and those who don’t. It is to listen respectfully to others’ opinions. DebateWatch is a way to incorporate a town meeting into each debate. We have invited civic groups, libraries, and educational institutions, in particular, to join DebateWatch2020. Our 2020 participants represent all 50 states.

Agnes Scott College  
Allegany College of Maryland  
American Association of State Colleges and Universities American Democracy Project  
Alpha Phi Alpha Kappa Phi Lambda Chapter  
Arizona Students Association  
Arkansas Tech University  
Atlantic Council of the United States  
Ball State University  
Bellevue College  
Borough of Manhattan Community College  
Bowdoin College  
Brigham Young University  
Brown University Taubman Center and Swearer Center  
Cacique2020  
California University of Pennsylvania  
California State University East Bay  
California State University Northridge  
Carter County Drug Prevention  
Central Arkansas Library System  
Centre College  
Chapman University  
Colby College  
Columbia State Community College  
Comal County Democratic Party  
Community Adaptation  
Connecticut College Camels Vote  
Consumnes River College  
Cottey College  
Dixie State University Institute of Politics and Public Affairs  
Duke University Polis: Center for Politics  
East Carolina University  
Elon University  
Emerson College Political Communication Program  
Emory University Emory Votes Initiative  
EXPLO  
Fairfield University
The Commission on Presidential Debates

Fayette Democratic Women
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
Florida International University
Florida Memorial University
For the People
Fork Union Military Academy
Freeman Holdings LLC
Furman University
George Washington University
The Graduate School of Political Management
George Washington University Scientology Club
Georgetown Debate
Gonzaga University Debate Team
Grinnell College Rosenfield Program/PPPE
Heidelberg University
Hillsdale College
Hofstra University
Houston Community College Honors College
Howard Payne University Speech and Debate Team
Illinois Institute of Technology
Illinois State University
Indiana State University
Indiana University East
Indiana University Kokomo
Indiana University North
Indiana University South Bend
Indiana University Southeast
Indiana University Debate Team
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
Iowa State University Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women & Politics
Jacksonville State University
James Madison Center for Civic Engagement
John Carroll University Arrupe Scholars
Johnson County Community College
Junior State of America Norfolk Senior High Chapter
Keene State College
Knox College Department of Political Science and International Relations
Lewis & Clark College
Lincoln University
Lipscomb University
Lone Star College Montgomery Center for Civic Engagement
Lone Star College North Harris
Lone Star College Tomball
Lone Star College University Park Center for Civic Engagement
Los Angeles Metropolitan Debate League
Loyola Marymount University
Marietta College
Menlo College
Mercer University Center for Community Engagement
Metropolitan State University of Denver
Michigan State University
Michiganders for Justice
Middle Georgia State University
Middle Tennessee State University
Mills College
Mississippi Votes
Missouri State Department of Communications
National Press Club
New Mexico First
New Mexico Tech
NewsTalk 107.9 Idaho Falls/Pocatello
Notre Dame High School
The Commission on Presidential Debates

University of Miami
University of Minnesota
University of Montana Max S. Baucus Institute
Department of Public Administration & Policy and Alexander Blewet III School of Law
University of Mount Union
Regula Center
University of Nebraska at Omaha
University of Nevada Las Vegas Debate Team
University of New Hampshire Carsey School of Public Policy
University of North Alabama & Alumni, Political Communication Course
University of North Carolina Greensboro
University of North Carolina Pembroke
University of North Texas Debate Team
University of Richmond
University of South Carolina Beaufort Communication Studies Program
University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee Campus
University of South Florida St. Petersburg
University of Utah
University of West Georgia
University of Wisconsin Parkside
University of Wisconsin Superior

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership & Elections Research Center
US Constitution Party of Virginia
Utah State University
Utah Valley University
Vanderbilt University
Vanderbilt University Debate Team
Virginia Wesleyan University
Wabash College
Washington State Debate Coalition
Washington University in St. Louis
Washington Urban Debate League
Waverly High School
Wayne State Forensic Union
Weber State University
Wesley College
Wesleyan University
Western Carolina University
Western Kentucky University
Western Michigan University WeVote
Wheaton College
Wichita State University
Widener University
Wigle Inc.
Winona State University
Worcester State University
Wright College
Yavapai College

For the current list of participants and to join, please visit
www.debates.org/debatewatch
International

Supporting the Global Movement for Candidate Debates

Given their central role in the elections, presidential debates in the United States are watched by audiences worldwide. Increasingly, other countries – particularly emerging democracies – believe that starting their own debate traditions will strengthen their elections and democracies. Often, they seek help in initiating debates. For more than 30 years, the CPD has responded to requests for assistance in a growing number of countries as they try to identify unbiased debate sponsors, choose substantive formats and impartial moderators, ensure fair and sound TV, radio and internet broadcasts, negotiate with candidates and the media, and engage citizens in the political life through debates.

The benefits of debates are many. To cite only two examples: Debates can also help voters make more informed choices at the ballot box. After the first ever 2014 presidential debates in Malawi, citizens reported that elections that year were more substantive and focused on issues that mattered to them personally. Debates also provided a useful side-by-side comparison of candidates and motivated them to vote. Similarly, in El Salvador, a media analyst noted in 2019 that one of the nation’s first presidential debates “…marked a milestone in [the country’s] nascent democracy…due to the clash of ideas and the presentation of the candidates to millions of compatriots in and outside of the country.”

Debates help promote peace and reconciliation in tense election environments. As an African debate participant stated, “The greatest thing about this debate is to see Liberian presidential candidates sitting here and talking to each other and trying to convince voters rather than being in the bush and shooting at each other.” Debates can provide an opportunity for candidates to publicly commit to peaceful elections. This includes agreeing to accept election results or using legal channels to resolve election disputes -- as occurred in Ghana, Kenya and other nations -- rather than calling supporters to the streets.

The CPD, in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), helps debate sponsors around the world share their expertise and assist each other, both in organizing debates for the first time and improving on past debates. The support draws on CPD and NDI collective experience with more than 425 debates in 45 countries at all levels of elected office. The underlying conviction is that there is no single best way to organize candidate debates and that countries should choose approaches that best fit with their culture and politics. CPD-NDI initiatives have included long-distance and in-country consultations with debate groups as well as multiple international symposiums in Washington,
The Commission on Presidential Debates

D.C., Mexico City, Mexico and Skopje, North Macedonia that brought together debate groups from around the world for the first time. Symposium participants have discussed practical issues such as establishing public criteria to determine which of dozens of candidates should be invited to debate; creating informative debate formats; producing debates; and working with the media to generate public support to encourage candidates to debate. The symposiums resulted in the creation of the 38-nation Debates International network and regional debate networks that foster ongoing conversation and consultation among members to tackle common challenges. Network resources include the Debates International on-line information center (www.debatesinternational.org) and Organizing and Producing Candidate Debates: An International Guide posted at the site.

To foster these international exchanges, the CPD and NDI have also hosted Debates International network members at U.S. presidential debates at Hofstra University (2012) and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (2016). The visits provided a first-hand look at the debate hall’s production elements, media filing center, and wide-ranging educational programs at the universities to engage students and the community in debates. The international visitors shared their own recent debate experiences with each other; in addition, they met with students, faculty and the media. The impact of Covid-19 on global travel will prohibit holding the international visit in 2020. A gathering in Washington, D.C. is planned for 2021. The CPD expresses its deep appreciation to the Howard G. Buffett Foundation for making the international debate exchanges and programming possible.

Debates International Network: Participating Countries

Argentina  Brazil  Canada  Chile  Colombia  Costa Rica  Curacao  Democratic Republic of Congo  Dominican Republic  El Salvador  Ecuador  Ghana  Guatemala  Guyana  Haiti  Honduras  Jamaica  Kenya  Lebanon  Liberia  Malawi  Mexico  Nepal  Niger  Nigeria  North Macedonia  Panama  Paraguay  Peru  Philippines  Serbia  Sierra Leone  South Korea  Timor Leste  Trinidad and Tobago  Tunisia  Uganda  United States
“Onward!”
Jim Lehrer, 1934-2020