



NEW: Americans for Tax Reform & Progressive Change Institute Will Co-Host Historic Open Debate

Signals National Importance of FL-Sen Debate as a Trial Run for Fall Presidential Debates; “The Commission Is Watching” Says Mike McCurry, Co-Chair of Commission on Presidential Debates

Open Debate Coalition Is Main Host -- Comprised of Leaders on Left, Right, And in Silicon Valley.

Voters Submit And Vote On Questions That Moderators Will Ask in Studio Debate Next Monday, April 25, 7pm EDT. Over 100,000 Votes Cast in 2 Days at

FloridaOpenDebate.com

Moderators Will Be The Young Turks And Independent Journal Review -- Top News Shows on YouTube And Vine. Billions of Views.

Today, the bipartisan Open Debate Coalition announced Americans for Tax Reform and the Progressive Change Institute will be co-hosts for the Open Debate for U.S. Senate in Florida on Monday, April 25.

The Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD) says they are watching this trial run in Florida as they make plans for Fall debate formats.

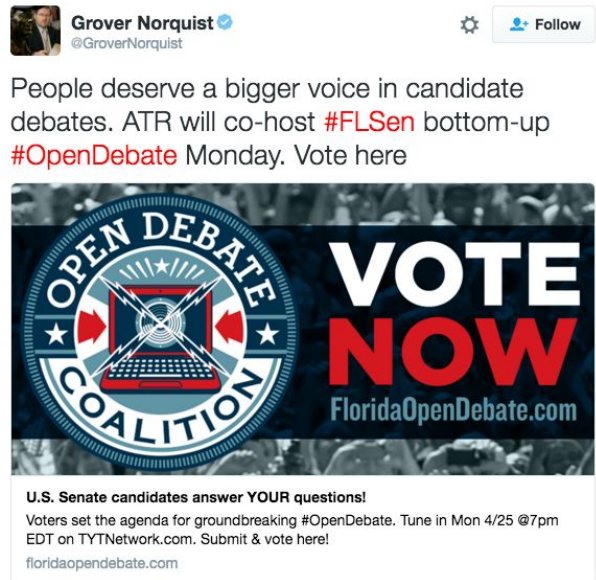
“The Commission is watching,” said CPD Co-Chair McCurry in a letter to the bipartisan Open Debate Coalition, which is the main host on Monday. “This is a real opportunity to shape the future of presidential debates.”

“The people deserve more of a voice over what questions get asked of politicians, and we are proud to be a member of the Open Debate Coalition and co-host of this historic Open Debate for U.S. Senate,” said Grover Norquist, President of Americans for Tax Reform.

“Hopefully, numerous Open Debates happen this 2016 cycle -- including in the presidential race. This Florida Senate Open Debate could be a prelude of innovations to come in the fall presidential debates.”

“At a time of so much dismay about our campaign finance and voting laws, bottom-up Open Debates are a bright spot for our democracy -- and we are proud to co-host Monday’s big Open Debate in Orlando,” **said Adam Green and Stephanie Taylor, co-founders of the Progressive Change Institute.** “This will empower regular people in an unprecedented way. We hope this historic event helps make Open Debates the norm in the future, from state and local races to Congress and all the way up to President.

Republican Congressman David Jolly (FL-13) and Democratic Congressman Alan Grayson (FL-9) will participate in a first-ever Open Debate for U.S. Senate, where regular people submit and vote on questions in advance -- and moderators must choose from the top 30 vote-getters.



Americans for Tax Reform President Grover Norquist [tweets](#) about co-hosting first-ever U.S. Senate Open Debate in Florida.

Debate moderators will include The Young Turks, which is the #1 news channel on YouTube with over 3 billion views, and Independent Journal Review, a social-first mobile-first news company that reaches on average more than 35 million unique viewers each month.

Over 100,000 votes have been cast in two days at FloridaOpenDebate.com. Question submission and voting and lasts through 12pm EDT on Monday, April 25. Anyone across the nation can submit and vote on questions. Only Florida votes will be counted when selecting questions, but others can cast votes to impact which questions are trending on the site -- influencing which questions Florida voters see and vote on most.

“Bottom-up Open Debates unite people across the political spectrum because they are not about right versus left, but new versus old,” said Lilia Tamm, Program Director for the Open Debate Coalition. “With modern technology, we can utilize the wisdom of the crowds at FloridaOpenDebate.com to bypass silly questions, gotcha questions, and questions about the news of the week -- and focus on issues voters care about most. We are thrilled to have members of Congress, moderators, and co-hosts from across the political spectrum for this historic Open Debate.”

The Open Debate Coalition was started in 2008, and it includes Republican, Democratic, and Silicon Valley leaders (See a list of coalition members and the Open Debate Coalition statement below). Early leaders in the coalition include Progressive ChangeInstitute co-founders Adam Green and Stephanie Taylor and Americans For Tax Reform President Grover Norquist.

An unprecedented “open video feed” will allow any website or TV station to broadcast top-quality debate footage live or re-broadcast later without violating copyright. The coalition hopes this leads to millions of new debate viewers online this cycle, especially younger viewers. Other distribution channels will be announced in coming days. The coalition’s logo was designed by artist Shep Fairey, who designed the iconic Obama “Hope” image.

Grayson and Jolly [announced](#) they would hold debates together on March 1, 2016. The Open Debate Coalition reached out about participating in an Open Debate, and both candidates agreed.

The Open Debate Coalition used the [invitation criteria](#) of the Commission on Presidential Debates. Every candidate in the Democratic and Republican Senate primary was invited if they averaged 15% or more support in publicly released polls taken in 2016. Grayson and Jolly accepted the invitation, and Congressman Patrick Murphy (D-18) declined.

Open Debate Coalition Statement and Signers

<http://OpenDebateCoalition.com/coalition-statement>

We are a coalition of people and organizations from across the ideological spectrum urging that political debates be made more “of the people” by bringing them fully into the Internet age.

Specifically, we endorse this Open Debate principle: The public should be empowered to conceive and select debate questions – so that questions addressed by candidates represent the will of the people.

This is not a matter of right versus left, but new versus old. Participatory democracy is a driving principle of the open Internet. The best ideas rise to the top, and the wisdom of crowds prevails.

Moderators can choose from among the top questions proposed and voted on by the public – and have discretion to ask follow-up questions. Many formats can be experimented with, some typical and others so innovative they have yet to be conceived.

As voter participation declines, voter-driven Open Debates that embrace the Internet’s bottom-up ethos could breathe fresh air into our democracy – and attract more young people to participate.

The members of the Open Debate Coalition don’t agree on every issue. But we agree that by bringing together the power of the Internet with the voices of voters, we can ensure that debates are truly “of the people.” We urge candidates, political parties, the media, and debate hosts to work with us and the public to transform our democracy through Open Debates. This represents the future of democracy, and we can make great strides together in the 2016 election.

Signed,

Adam Green and Stephanie Taylor (Co-Founders, Progressive Change Campaign Committee and Progressive Change Institute)

Grover Norquist (Founder, Americans for Tax Reform)

Jimmy Wales (Co-Founder, Wikipedia)

Craig Newmark (Founder, craigslist)

Cindy Cohn (Executive Director, Electronic Frontier Foundation)

Chris Kelly (Former Chief Privacy Officer, Facebook; Founder, Kelly Investments; Chair, Organizer Inc.)

Terry O’Neill (President, National Organization for Women)

Mindy Finn (Former Digital Strategy Director, Mitt Romney; Former Senior Digital Advisor, Republican National Committee; Founder, Empowered Women)

Tim O’Reilly (Founder, O’Reilly Media)

Rashad Robinson (Executive Director, ColorOfChange.org)
Paul Rieckhoff (Executive Director, Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America)
Michael Turk (Former eCampaign Director, Republican National Committee and Bush/Cheney '04)
Anna Galland and Ilya Sheyman (Executive Directors, MoveOn.org Civic and Political Action)
Ilyse Hogue (President, NARAL Pro-Choice America)
Shepard Fairey (Artist known for iconic Obama "Hope" poster)
Albert Jacquez (Deputy Executive Director, National Council of La Raza Action Fund)
Jon Henke (Former New Media Director, U.S. Senate Republicans and Fred Thompson for President; Strategic Director, TechFreedom)
Cenk Uygur, Host, The Young Turks.
Nita Chaudhary (Co-Executive Director, UltraViolet)
Chris Shelton (President, Communications Workers of America)
Michael Brune (Executive Director, Sierra Club)
Markos Moulitsas (Founder, DailyKos)
Glenn Reynolds (Founder, Instapundit)
Joichi Ito (Director, MIT Media Lab)
Cory Doctorow (Author, blogger, journalist)
David Moore (Executive Director, AskThem.io, Participatory Politics Foundation)
Ethan Zuckerman (Director, MIT Center for Civic Media)
Jared Friedman (Founder, Scribd; Partner, Y Combinator)
Marvin Ammori (Lawyer, Technology Strategist)
Micah Sifry and Andrew Rasiej (Co-Founders, Personal Democracy Media, Civic Hall)
Jim Dean (Chair, Democracy for America)
May Boeve (Executive Director, 350 Action)
Roy Beck (President, NumbersUSA)
Joseph Bast (President & CEO, The Heartland Institute)
Alex Lawson (Executive Director, Social Security Works)
Alexandra Flores-Quilty (President, United States Student Association)
Christopher Long (President, Intercollegiate Studies Institute)
David Segal (Executive Director, Demand Progress and Rootstrikers)
Peter Wood & Ashley Thorne (President & Executive Director, National Association of Scholars)
Kenneth Roth (Executive Director, Human Rights Watch)
Murshed Zaheed (Political Director, CREDO Action)
Rea Carey (Executive Director, National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund)
Crowdpac
Greenpeace
Robert Greenwald (Founder, Brave New Films)
Marissa Brown (Executive Director, Democracy Initiative)
Miles Rapoport (President, Common Cause)
Arianna Huffington is also a member of the Open Debate Coalition.

Note from Mike McCurry, Co-Chair Of The Commission On Presidential Debates, To The Open Debate Coalition. Shared With Permission.

I have enjoyed our discussions about how to improve the general election debates and better fulfill the mission of the Commission on Presidential Debates to make the fall debates as educational as possible for American voters.

The Commission is watching the primary debates closely looking for innovation.

We are especially interested in how the internet and social media can be utilized to generate real questions from real people. We'd be especially interested in any experiments or new technologies the Open Debates Coalition employs during the primary season to generate questions from the American public and put them – via a journalist/moderator – to the candidates. We have a working group exploring many ideas about debate formats and we hope to build on those things which are working to create a more vibrant public debate.

This is a real opportunity to shape the future of presidential debates, not only in the primaries but the general election as well. We'll be watching your progress with great interest.

All best,

Mike McCurry
Co-Chairman,
Commission on Presidential Debates

OPEN DEBATE COALITION BACKGROUND

During the 2008 presidential campaign, a coalition of progressives, conservatives, and Silicon Valley leaders launched the OpenDebate Coalition to make debates more representative of the will of the people. In the Open Debate format, regular voters across the nation submit and vote on questions on an online platform in advance of the debate. For the live event, moderators choose from among the questions that received the most votes -- asking follow-up questions along the way.

The original coalition included Jimmy Wales (Wikipedia), Craig Newmark (craigslist), Democracy for America, MoveOn, the National Organization for Women, the Sierra Club, Adam Green (Progressive Change), Grover Norquist (Americans for Tax Reform), DailyKos, RedState, National Organization of Women, Newt Gingrich (American Solutions), Arianna Huffington, Aaron Swartz (Reddit), former digital directors for the Republican National Committee and

George W. Bush, and leaders from the Electronic Frontier Foundation, ColorOfChange.org, and many [others](#).

The coalition saw amazing success. [Our initial request was that networks put presidential debate video in the public domain or Creative Commons to allow debate moments to have a life online without legal peril.](#) Within weeks, [CNN](#), [ABC](#), [NBC](#), and CBS agreed. The coalition then announced bottom-up Open Debate principles to make questions represent what the public cared about, and the [Obama and McCain](#) campaigns both endorsed them. In August 2013, the Progressive Change Campaign Committee sponsored [the first-ever Open Debate](#) in a Massachusetts special election for Congress. Over 1,600 [questions were submitted](#), over 79,000 votes were cast, and all 5 candidates participated and loved it. Instead of questions about [the horserace and the gaffe of the week](#), the top questions were all substantive. Many were on issues that the media rarely ask about. In late 2014, a similar bottom-up process yielded over 1,000,000 votes. An Open Debate featuring the presidential candidates would have more participation by an order of magnitude or more.

The coalition has expanded its membership in advance of the 2016 elections, adding tech luminaries like Tim O'Reilly (O'Reilly media) and Chris Kelly (fmr Chief Privacy Officer at Facebook), as well as numerous issue-based groups like Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. The coalition has also invested in technology enhancements so the question platform can accommodate traffic volumes that would accompany a larger, national event – and artist Shep Fairey, who designed the iconic Obama hope poster, has joined the coalition and designed our logo.

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