

**FIRST-EVER U.S. SENATE OPEN DEBATE TO TAKE PLACE IN  
FLORIDA, APRIL 25**



**Democratic and Republican Congressmen  
Alan Grayson & David Jolly To Participate  
In Bottom-Up Open Debate In FL-Sen Race**

**Left, Right, And Silicon Valley Leaders Team Up To  
Set Stage For Innovation In 2016 Presidential Debates**

**Voters Submit And Vote On Questions At [FloridaOpenDebate.com](http://FloridaOpenDebate.com) That  
Moderators Will Ask In Studio Debate**

**Moderators Will Be The Young Turks And Independent Journal Review -- #1  
News Shows On YouTube And Vine. Progressive Change Institute and  
Americans For Tax Reform Are Key Leaders In Coalition.**

Today, the bipartisan Open Debate Coalition announced that 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. This in-person studio debate will take place in Orlando at 7pm EDT on Monday, April 25.

Question submission and voting is now open at [FloridaOpenDebate.com](http://FloridaOpenDebate.com) 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.

The debate is hosted by the Open Debate Coalition, which was started in 2008 and 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 Change Institute co-founders Adam Green and Stephanie Taylor and Americans For Tax Reform President Grover Norquist.

The Commission On Presidential Debates indicated they are looking to this Florida debate and similar Open Debates as they seek innovative formats for the 2016 general election. (See statement below.)

“At a time when a corrupt campaign finance system and rigged voting laws are damaging our democracy, Open Debates are a bright spot for our democracy – empowering regular people in an unprecedented way. We hope this historic event helps makes Open Debates the norm in the future, from state and local races to Congress and all the way up to President,” said coalition leaders Adam Green and Stephanie Taylor, Co-Founders of the Progressive Change Institute. Another coalition leader, Americans For Tax Reform President Grover Norquist, added, “Hopefully, numerous Open Debates happen this 2016 cycle – including in the race for President.”

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. Other distribution channels will be announced in coming days.

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. 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.

## STATEMENTS FROM COALITION LEADERS, PARTICIPANTS, AND COMMISSION:

**Lilia Tamm, Open Debate Coalition Program Director:** “This debate represents a new high-water mark when it comes to debates that represent the will of the people. Bottom-up Open Debates unite people across the political spectrum because they are not about right versus left, but new versus old. With modern technology, we can utilize the wisdom of crowds at FloridaOpenDebate.com and bypass silly questions, gotcha questions, and questions about the news of the week – and focus on issues voters care about most.”

**Adam Green and Stephanie Taylor, Co-Founders, Progressive Change Institute:** “At a time when a corrupt campaign finance system and rigged voting laws are damaging our democracy, Open Debates are a bright spot for our democracy – empowering regular people in an unprecedented way. We hope this historic event helps makes Open Debates the norm in the future, from state and local races to Congress and all the way up to President.”

**Grover Norquist, President, Americans For Tax Reform:** “As a member of the Open Debate Coalition, I am very glad the candidates agreed to use this innovative format and will answer questions that are submitted and voted on by the public. Hopefully, numerous Open Debates happen this 2016 cycle – including in the race for President.”

**David Jolly, Republican Congressman, Florida’s 13<sup>th</sup> District:** “This is a debate over the future of Florida, officiated by the voters, and intended to present two contrasting visions for the future of the country.”

**Alan Grayson, Democratic Congressman, Florida’s 9<sup>th</sup> District:** “Rep. Jolly agreed to join me in debating the issues that matter most to those who will pick Florida’s next Senator. Using the Open Debate Coalition model helps ensure we actually respond to the will of the people – and not just answer to the whims and wishes of the establishment and special interest agendas.”

**Mike McCurry, Co-Chairman, Commission on Presidential Debates:** “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 that are working to create a more vibrant public debate.”

**Cenk Uygur, Host and CEO, The Young Turks:** “Traditional media’s approval ratings are now down to 6%. The American people are clearly not happy with the filter they are putting on the news. So, it's time to take off the filter and have Open Debates where we hear the candidates respond directly to voter questions. I can’t wait for real questions that demand real answers from our representatives.”

**Benny Johnson, Creative Director, Independent Journal Review:** “Politicians should speak to the internet the way it likes to be spoken to. That, firstly, involves a two way conversation that connects real people, facing real problems with the elected officials responsible for addressing them. The Open Debate Coalition has created a debate model that respects the social web. We’re honored to co-moderate this debate with true political Internet pioneers, The Young Turks. We're gonna have some fun.”

## **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)

Heather McGhee (President, Demos)

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 that 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 Open Debate 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 five 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 million votes. An Open Debate featuring the presidential candidates would have more participation by an order of magnitude.

The coalition has expanded its membership in advance of the 2016 elections, adding tech luminaries such as Tim O'Reilly (O'Reilly Media) and Chris Kelly (former Chief Privacy Officer at Facebook), as well as numerous issue-based groups such as 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.