



For Presidential Town Hall Debate, Public Will Vote On Questions At Cross-Partisan Open Debate Coalition's PresidentialOpenQuestions.com

***After Meetings With Right-Left-Tech Coalition, ABC,
CNN Agree to Receive Top 30 Bottom-Up Questions
For Consideration In Debate***

***For First Time, Commission On Presidential Debate
Mandates Oct. 9 Town Hall Moderators Ask Questions
With Input From The Internet. Co-Chair Mike McCurry:
Public Questions "Carry Greater Weight."***

***Grover Norquist, Progressive Change Campaign Committee, Craig Newmark of
Craigslist, Arianna Huffington, Ralph Reed, National Organization for Women,
Iraq and Afghanistan Vets, Color Of Change, Jimmy Wales of Wikipedia, Others
Team Up On First-Of-Its-Kind Effort***

Immediately after the first presidential debate, the cross-partisan Open Debate Coalition is announcing that the public will submit and vote on questions at PresidentialOpenQuestions.com -- and ABC and CNN have agreed to receive the most popular 30 questions for consideration in the October 9 presidential town hall debate.

For the first time, the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD) has mandated that moderators of the town hall debate ask questions with input from the internet -- not just questions from voters in the physical room. In 2008, [President Obama and Senator McCain](#) endorsed the coalition's call for bottom-up questions, but the CPD did not incorporate the idea until this year.

"The commission was watching closely as the Open Debate Coalition tested out their innovative bottom-up question submission and voting platform in the primaries this year, and we were impressed with the results," said **Mike McCurry, Co-Chair of the Commission on Presidential Debates**, "This year's presidential

debate moderators will have a rich pool of voter-submitted questions they can draw on that carry greater weight because they are backed by votes from the American people."

"After coalition meetings with ABC and CNN, the networks have agreed to receive the top 30 questions submitted and voted on by the public at PresidentialOpenQuestions.com for consideration in the portion of the town hall debate featuring questions from the internet," **said Lilia Tamm Dixon, Open Debate Coalition Director.** "This coalition effort is a first-of-its-kind attempt to ensure moderators can ask questions that are not just submitted by the public, but voted on by the public to truly represent what Republican, Democratic, and Independent families are discussing around their dinner tables. Open Debates are the future."

Top ABC and CNN debate producers had meetings recently with Open Debate Coalition Director Lilia Tamm Dixon, Americans For Tax Reform President Grover Norquist, and Progressive Change Campaign Committee Co-Founder Adam Green -- leading to their agreement. This followed over a year of engagement between the coalition and CPD in advance of the historic [announcement](#) that town hall moderators must ask questions with input from the internet. Question submission and voting is now open at PresidentialOpenQuestions.com and coalition organizations will ask their supporters to participate.

The Open Debate Coalition has successfully held open debates in the 2013 special election for Congress in Massachusetts and in the 2016 U.S. Senate [debate](#) in Florida. Between the two open debates, more than 2,500 questions were submitted and over 450,000 votes were cast. The Florida debate received over half a million views and was aired on C-SPAN several times. The AP [reported](#), "Both candidates said they enjoyed the format...saying they were more substantive than a typical debate would have been."

"There is a mutual frustration with presidential debate questions dominated by a handful of television personalities rather than average voters," said **Grover Norquist, Founder of Americans for Tax Reform.** "Our coalition meetings with ABC and CNN have been constructive, and we're eager to see both candidates answer questions that are submitted and voted on by the public in a nationally-televised presidential debate. We anticipate many more Open Debates in the future -- up and down the ballot."

"Bottom-up participation isn't just about choosing topics. It's about allowing the public to truly frame the questions in a way that addresses what voters are actually asking at their kitchen tables," **said Adam Green, Co-Founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee.** "We are very hopeful that ABC and CNN will maximize this opportunity and help lead the way for Open Debates to become the new norm for debates in American politics."

"A more open democracy is always a better one," **said Arianna Huffington, founder of The Huffington Post and health-and-wellness startup Thrive Global.** "In this critical election year, it is imperative that the questions on the minds of voters are asked and answered. ABC and CNN deserve kudos for embracing this participatory model."

"As technology changes, questions posed by moderators to candidates should reflect bottom-up participation from the public -- reinforced by strong follow-up questions and fact checking to ensure the public's questions are answered," **said Craig Newmark, founder of craigslist.** "I'm proud to be a founding member of the Open Debate Coalition because bottom-up questions and trustworthy moderation that represents the will of the people is an idea whose time has come."

The Open Debate Coalition was formed during the 2008 election cycle. It includes: Americans for Tax Reform, the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, FreedomWorks, MoveOn, Faith & Freedom Coalition Founder Ralph Reed, the National Organization for Women, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Color Of Change, Numbers USA, Presente, Arianna Huffington, former Romney senior aide Mindy Finn, craigslist founder Craig Newmark, Electronic Frontier Foundation President Cindy Cohn, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, and many more. (See full list of coalition members below.)

"At Define American, we believe that in order to change politics, we first have to change culture. For years, conversations about immigrants have been held without including immigrant families themselves, and this

exciting effort will change that," **said Jose Antonio Vargas, Founder & CEO of Define American.** "This will be a rare opportunity to have candidates for the most critical position in the world respond directly to those they'll represent: the increasingly diverse American public."

"NumbersUSA will reach out to the seven million Americans in our network, urging them to participate in this innovative bottom-up process to ensure that moderators can engage on topics such as immigration and border security in a way that educates voters and truly addresses their questions," said **Roy Beck, Executive Director of NumbersUSA.**

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Background resources below include:

- Open Debate Coalition Statement of Principles & Signers
- Open Debate Coalition Background
- Sample Email from Americans For Tax Reform promoting Open Debates.
- April 2016 Florida U.S. Senate Open Debate Summary

Open Debate Coalition Statement & 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)

Ralph Reed (Founder & Chairman, Faith & Freedom Coalition)

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)

Adam Brandon (President & CEO, FreedomWorks)

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 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)

Ed Martin (President, Eagle Forum)

Ben Rattray (Founder and CEO, Change.org)

Chris Shelton (President, Communications Workers of America)

Michael Brune (Executive Director, Sierra Club)

Markos Moulitsas (Founder, DailyKos)

Glenn Reynolds (Founder, Instapundit)

Craig Aaron (President & CEO, Free Press Action Fund)

Joichi Ito (Director, MIT Media Lab)

Matt Nelson (Executive Director, Presente)

Louis Elrod (President, Young Democrats of America)

Gene Karpinski (President, League of Conservation Voters)

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)

Jose Antonio Vargas (CEO, Define American)

Roy Beck (President, NumbersUSA)

Jeremy Ben-Ami (President, J Street)

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)

Ana María Archila (Co-Executive Director, Center for Popular Democracy Action)

Heather Hargreaves (Vice President, NextGen Climate)

Greenpeace

David Segal (Executive Director, Demand Progress and Rootstrikers)

Ashley Thorne & Peter Wood (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

Robert Greenwald (Founder, Brave New Films)

Marissa Brown (Executive Director, Democracy Initiative)

Karen Hobert Flynn (President, Common Cause)

Dennis M. Kelleher (President and CEO, Better Markets)
Mark Riddle (President, New Leaders Council)
Robert Weissman (President, Public Citizen)
Jodi Jacobson (President and Editor-in-Chief, Rewire)
David Donnelly (President and CEO, Every Voice)
Nick Nyhart (President and CEO, Every Voice Center)
Mary Rickles and Eric Thut (Communications Director and Interim Executive Director, Netroots Nation)
Robyn Thomas (Executive Director, Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence)
Dean Baker (Co-Founder, Center for Economic and Policy Research)
Stosh Cotler (CEO, Bend the Arc Jewish Action)
Deepak Pateriya (Executive Director, Center for Community Change Action)

Arianna Huffington is also a member of the Open Debate Coalition.

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, and many were on issues that the media rarely ask about.

In April 2016, Americans for Tax Reform and Progressive Change Institute partnered on a [televised, bi-partisan debate for U.S. Senate](#) in Florida in which the public cast over 400,000 votes to select the [top questions](#). The event was broadcast five times on C-SPAN, and videos of the event have been seen close to a half-million times online since the event took place.

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 including Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Faith & Freedom Coalition, CWA, FreedomWorks, and the US Student Association. And artist Shep Fairey, who designed the iconic Obama "Hope" poster, has joined the coalition and designed our logo.

Sample email sent by Americans for Tax Reform

From: Americans for Tax Reform <ideas@atr.org>

Date: September 22, 2016 at 1:14:26 PM EDT

To: Jane Smith

Subject: What Would You Ask Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton? Submit Your Debate Questions.

Dear Jane,

Liberals were outraged last week when Matt Lauer delivered a supposedly biased debate performance. Our reaction? Welcome to the club.

Candy Crowley. George Stephanopoulos. John King. John Harwood. When debate moderators aren't coming to the defense of liberal candidates, they're focusing on polling, political gaffes, and pitting the candidates against each other, all the while ignoring the real concerns that American families discuss around their dinner tables.

As Washington Examiner columnist and AEI scholar Tim Carney put it, "Why not ask of the candidates the sort of questions the voters would ask?"

Why not, indeed?

Behind the scenes, we are helping to lead a coalition of conservative, progressive and tech leaders called the Open Debate Coalition -- pushing to reform the upcoming presidential debates to include questions submitted AND VOTED ON by the public.

We are making real progress.

[In our meetings with decision makers, it would be immensely helpful to have examples of thoughtful, substantive questions from the public. Click here to submit yours.](#)

Earlier this year, ATR and the Open Debate Coalition proved how bottom-up questions can work in an actual debate. The coalition sponsored a U.S. Senate debate between a Republican and Democrat member of Congress. Over 900 questions were submitted, over 400,000 votes were cast in advance of the event, and all questions came from the top 30 voted on by the public!

Here was some of the public reaction:

"#OpenDebate is by far the best debate this election cycle."

"I would love nothing more than a #OpenDebate Presidential Debate come October time. Real issues, intelligent debate, no fluff."

"The #OpenDebate format is definitely the format of the future."

[Help change the future. Submit a question today.](#)

The Atlantic wrote a piece called, "A Debate Where Voters Pick The Questions" and reported on our coalition's debate: "There were no process or campaign questions, no bragging over polls, no obvious efforts by the moderators

to get the candidates to attack each other. The format is an experiment developed by the Open Debate Coalition, a bipartisan group that has pushed to make debates both more accessible and more democratic."

The Federalist magazine reminds us that unless we [take action](#), "journalists will moderate and control what topics are covered, how questions are framed, and what assumptions are built into topics" in upcoming political debates.

We're working hard to change things, but we need your help now.

[Submit a thoughtful question to show you agree that presidential debates should represent the will of the people -- not fluff questions, distraction questions, softball questions, or gotcha questions. Moderators should ask candidates questions that are submitted -- and voted on -- by the public.](#)

And please send this to others. We have just a few weeks to make this happen.

In Liberty,
Grover Norquist
President, American For Tax Reform

April 2016 Florida U.S. Senate Open Debate Summary

900 questions. 400,000 votes. Covered by Florida TV and newspapers. Over half-a million views online. Aired on C-SPAN multiple times. View the debate here:



THE ATLANTIC: [A Debate Where the Voters Pick the Questions](#)

POLITICO: [Commission on Presidential Debates considers taking crowdsourced questions](#)

USA TODAY: [Florida Senate race tests crowd-sourced debate](#)

HUFFINGTON POST: [Real Voters Ask All The Questions For This Senate Debate](#)

THE HILL: [Coalition holds bipartisan crowdsourced Florida Senate debate](#)

AP: [Grayson, Jolly get crowd-sourced questions in debate for US Senate seat](#)

FLORIDA POLITICS: [Florida's U.S. Senate 'Open Debate' Brings Out Policy](#)

Sampling of Online Reaction to the Debate

 Fitz Hugh Ludlow @FitzLudlow #OpenDebate is by far the best debate this election cycle. If CNN had any sense they would hire TYT to moderate the next presidential one! 2 6:58 PM - 25 Apr 2016	 Zaire @FysDum #OpenDebate by Alan Grayson & David Jolly is getting rave reviews. Any chance this is the model of debates 4 next decade? 6 7:32 PM - 25 Apr 2016
 tricknole @tricknole Thank you @AlanGrayson and @DavidJollyFL for the quality #OpenDebate. Please encourage your colleagues to partake in this form of democracy 3 8:21 PM - 25 Apr 2016	 David Lagos @David_Lagos I would love nothing more than a #OpenDebate Presidential Debate come October time.. Real issues, intelligent debate, no fluff. #FLSen 17 8:12 PM - 25 Apr 2016
 Dominic Cacoppo @Norebro11 The #OpenDebate format is definitely the format of the future. Kudos to @OpenDebates theatln.tc/1YTEadX 01:42 AM - 30 Apr 16	 Roxann @roxannlovesu VOTE  my question #FLSen #OpenDebate @DavidJollyFL & @AlanGrayson h/t @OpenDebates @ProgChangeInst h/t @Roxann2016 floridaopendebate.com/questions/1753... 12:20 PM - 25 Apr 16

David Jolly Retweeted

**Gabrielle Derenthal** @Gabi_Designs · Apr 25
@OpenDebate IS the future of U.S. politics. Florida should be proud, as should @DavidJollyFL and @AlanGrayson for their excellent arguments.
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