

September 23, 2020

The Commission on Presidential Debates  
1200 New Hampshire Avenue NW  
Suite 445  
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Board,

Communities across the country are struggling with several intersecting crises: the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice, mass unemployment, and economic inequality. Climate change amplifies all of these crises, causing public health disasters, uprooting communities, and disproportionately harming marginalized, frontline, and low-income communities. In 2020 alone, record-breaking wildfires have ravaged Western states, extreme heat waves have jeopardized our health and safety, water levels in the Great Lakes have continued to shift, and catastrophic hurricanes have destroyed homes and livelihoods.

The climate crisis isn't coming, it's here.

The 2016 presidential debates were the most-watched in U.S. history;<sup>1</sup> however, there was not a single question on climate change asked by the moderators during any of the four debates. This cannot happen again. Too much is at stake.

With the potential for tens of millions of people to once again tune in this September and October, it is critical that every debate includes questions that ask the candidates what they would do to address climate change and environmental injustice. Without these topics, any discussion on the economy, racial justice, public health, national security, democracy, or infrastructure would be incomplete.

We are writing today to join 70 of our colleagues in the House of Representatives in urging you to break precedent and publicly call on the moderators to include climate in the topics that will be addressed during the debates.<sup>2</sup>

The upcoming presidential and vice-presidential debates provide an opportunity for voters to hear directly from the candidates fighting to lead our country for the next four years. This is not just any election. It is one that will determine how our country responds to the worsening climate crisis that we face each and every day--we don't have another election cycle to wait. Voters

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<sup>1</sup> Merrit Kennedy, *Clinton-Trump Showdown Was The Most-Watched Presidential Debate Ever*, NPR (Sep. 27, 2016), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/09/27/495692196/clinton-trump-showdown-is-most-watched-presidential-debate>.

<sup>2</sup> Mike Levin, Steny Hoyer, *et al.*, *Letter to the Commission on Presidential Debates* (Sep. 2, 2020), <https://www.climatepower2020.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/09/letter-commission.pdf>.

deserve to hear from candidates about how they plan to protect our communities now and in the future, and polling shows that voters are looking for leaders who will do just that.<sup>3</sup>

Voters, regardless of their party affiliation or candidate preference, must have the opportunity to hear directly from the candidates about what they have done and plan to do to fight this crisis. We urge you to take the steps necessary to ensure that this debate cycle will not let the climate change topic go unaddressed.

Thank you,

/s/

Edward J. Markey

U.S. Senator

/s/

Charles E. Schumer

U.S. Senator

/s/

Richard J. Durbin

U.S. Senator

/s/

Debbie Stabenow

U.S. Senator

/s/

Thomas R. Carper

U.S. Senator

/s/

Cory A. Booker

U.S. Senator

/s/

Bernard Sanders

U.S. Senator

/s/

Maria Cantwell

U.S. Senator

/s/

Catherine Cortez Masto

U.S. Senator

/s/

Elizabeth Warren

U.S. Senator

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<sup>3</sup> Global Strategy Group, *Fighting back against climate attacks in 2020*, Climate Power 2020 (July 2020), <https://www.climatepower2020.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/07/GSG-Climate-Power-Deck-FINAL.pdf>.

/s/

Ron Wyden  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Tim Kaine  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Sherrod Brown  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Jacky Rosen  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Tom Udall  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Tammy Baldwin  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Brian Schatz  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Richard Blumenthal  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Sheldon Whitehouse  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Tammy Duckworth  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Dianne Feinstein  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Patty Murray  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
U.S. Senator

/s/

Mazie K. Hirono

U.S. Senator

/s/

Gary C. Peters

U.S. Senator

/s/

Amy Klobuchar

U.S. Senator

/s/

Kirsten Gillibrand

U.S. Senator

/s/

Chris Van Hollen

U.S. Senator

/s/

Mark R. Warner

U.S. Senator

/s/

Tina Smith

U.S. Senator

/s/

Michael F. Bennet

U.S. Senator

/s/

Jeanne Shaheen

U.S. Senator

/s/

Maggie Hassan

U.S. Senator

/s/

Jack Reed

U.S. Senator

/s/

Martin Heinrich

U.S. Senator

/s/

Christopher Murphy

U.S. Senator