

**REPUBLICAN**  
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NATIONAL COMMITTEE

January 13, 2022

Frank J. Fahrenkopf  
Kenneth Wollack  
Co-Chairs  
The Commission on Presidential Debates  
P.O. Box 58247  
Washington, D.C. 20037

Dear Mr. Fahrenkopf and Mr. Wollack:

The RNC responds to your letter of December 14, continuing the correspondence we initiated in June. The RNC has shared our concerns with the CPD in good faith, carefully documenting why the party and its voters have lost faith in your organization, and we have proposed commonsense reforms that would restore trust in the debates process. Unfortunately, neither the tone nor substance of your latest response inspires confidence that the CPD will meaningfully address the serious issues which the RNC has raised.

For reference, a brief timeline of our communications is as follows:

- Beginning with phone conversations on March 22 and April 5, 2021 and continuing with an in-person meeting on May 6, the RNC raised its concerns through discussions between CPD Co-Chair Fahrenkopf and RNC Member David Bossie, who serves as Chair of the RNC's Temporary Presidential Debates Committee.
- On June 1 the RNC wrote to the CPD outlining its serious missteps and the partisan actions of its board members, explaining that these actions have damaged the RNC's faith that the CPD can provide a fair and impartial forum for presidential debates, and proposing reforms to address these concerns.
- On July 12 David Bossie, RNC Chief of Staff Richard Walters, and I met with CPD Co-Chair Fahrenkopf via Zoom to discuss the RNC's concerns.
- On July 15 the CPD responded, stating that it would keep the RNC's concerns "in mind" during its internal review of the 2020 debates but declining to address any of the specific issues raised, other than stating that it would be "mindful" of the "early voting issue" as it schedules presidential debates for 2024.
- On October 1 the RNC responded asking if the CPD intended to adopt any of the proposed reforms. Noting the lack of transparency in the CPD's internal decision-making, the RNC further requested that the CPD adopt a policy permitting any political party whose nominee participated in the previous election cycle's debates to appoint a nonvoting observer to attend CPD Board meetings.



- On November 15 I hosted CPD Co-Chair Fahrenkopf at the RNC to discuss these issues in person. The meeting was cordial but yielded no firm indication that the CPD is committed to addressing the RNC's concerns.
- On December 14 the CPD responded again declining any firm commitment toward reform, while stating that it “answers to no political party or candidate” and “does not negotiate the terms or conditions of [its] operations with anyone.” The CPD did state that it will consider scheduling issues related to early voting, the partisan activities of its board members, and moderator selection processes as part of its internal “quadrennial review.” However, the CPD also refused to allow nonvoting observers to attend its Board meetings, claiming that doing so might jeopardize its status as a nonpartisan organization.

The RNC's concerns strike at the core of whether the CPD credibly can provide a fair and impartial forum for presidential debates. The CPD's failures, which the RNC has outlined, are fundamental. These include:

- Waiting until after early voting had already begun to host the first presidential debate;
- Making unilateral changes to previously agreed-upon debate formats and conditions, in some cases without even notifying the candidates;
- Selecting a moderator who had once worked for the Democrat nominee, a glaring conflict of interest; and
- Failing to maintain the organization's strict nonpartisanship, with a majority of its Board Members publicly disparaging the Republican nominee.

The CPD must address these glaring failures if the organization is to have any credibility with the Republican Party and its 74 million voters moving forward. To do this, the CPD should enact the following much-needed reforms:

- Adopt term limits for its Board of Directors, several members of which have served for more than a decade;
- Commit to holding at least one debate before the start of early voting, and in no case after the deadline for states to mail absentee ballots to uniformed and overseas voters;
- Enact a code of conduct prohibiting CPD officers, directors, and staff from making public comments supporting or opposing any candidate, or otherwise engaging in partisan political activity in connection with the presidential election, with meaningful consequences for violations;
- Establish transparent criteria for selecting debate moderators that would disqualify individuals from consideration who have apparent conflicts of interest due to personal, professional, or partisan factors; and
- Enact a transparent code of conduct for moderators in conducting debates, including guidelines for appropriate interactions with the participating nominees, with meaningful penalties for violations.

These proposals are common sense solutions for an organization whose unique, nonpartisan role in American elections requires it to stand above the political fray. Indeed, we believe that

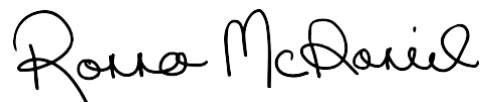
most neutral observers would be shocked to learn that these overdue reforms are not already CPD policy.

Unfortunately, the CPD's responses so far seem designed to delay any reform until it is too late to matter for the 2024 election. The RNC initiated this dialogue on behalf of its future nominee, who will undoubtedly meet any debate participation criteria. As you know that individual will have little opportunity to have this dialogue with the CPD given the short window between his or her nomination and the first debate. By then the CPD will have already completed its "quadrennial review," structural changes will be impossible, and planning for the 2024 presidential debates will essentially be complete. The RNC therefore cannot simply "wait and see," as the CPD seems to suggest, but must act now. To do otherwise would forestall any meaningful reform and conveniently leave the CPD unaccountable for another election cycle.

We are especially frustrated with the CPD's refusal to enact reforms aimed at ensuring nonpartisanship by claiming that doing so would somehow render the organization *more* partisan. The RNC has made clear that it understands the need for the CPD to be nonpartisan, and in fact has initiated this dialogue toward that end. As the RNC has proposed, one easy measure to restore trust would be to allow a representative from parties that have participated in past debates to observe CPD Board meetings, not on the basis of partisan affiliation, but on a party's respective candidate having met the previous cycle's debate participation criteria. We fail to see how that specific proposal, or any of the RNC's other recommendations for that matter, would jeopardize the CPD's nonpartisanship, as you suggest. Instead, the Commission appears more concerned about the supposed "partisanship" of allowing recent participants to observe its Board meetings than it is of its own partisan actions and those of its members and moderators.

The RNC has a duty to ensure that its future presidential nominees have the opportunity to debate their opponents on a level playing field. So long as the CPD appears intent on stonewalling the meaningful reforms necessary to restore its credibility with the Republican Party as a fair and nonpartisan actor, the RNC will take every step to ensure that future Republican presidential nominees are given that opportunity elsewhere. Accordingly, the RNC will initiate the process of amending the *Rules of the Republican Party* at our upcoming Winter Meeting to prohibit future Republican nominees from participating in CPD-sponsored debates.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronna McDaniel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ronna McDaniel  
Chairman, Republican National Committee