

United States Senate

September 18, 2024

Almin Karamehmedovic
ABC News
47 West 66th Street
New York, NY 10023

Julie Chávez Rodriguez
Harris-Walz Campaign Manager
1000 N. West Street
Wilmington, DE 19801

Dear Mr. Karamehmedovic and Ms. Rodriguez,

I write to you concerning the blatant partiality of ABC News during the September 10, 2024, debate between President Trump and Vice President Harris. Recent reporting has suggested the possibility that the Harris campaign may have inappropriately influenced the proceedings to benefit Vice President Harris and undermine President Trump. This was accomplished, among other tactics, via excessive fact checking of President Trump while allowing Kamala Harris to avoid answering questions directly. If these and other allegations are true, the impartiality of the mainstream media will continue to be questioned by the American people.

In recent years, Americans have increasingly become even more distrustful of the mainstream media's bias, with recent polling reporting that "only 3 in 10 residents of six of the most important states in this year's presidential election trust that the media will fairly and accurately report political news."¹ Specifically relating to ABC News, independent media watchdogs, such as AllSides Media, have characterized the outlet as displaying a left lean bias that moderately aligns "with liberal, progressive, or left-wing thought and/or policy agendas."² In recent days and months, these preferences have overtly influenced ABC's coverage of the 2024 presidential race, with the station producing a 100 percent positive spin score for Vice President Harris, while President Trump has been depicted in an overwhelmingly negative light, garnering a 93 percent negative spin score.³

Additionally, the moderators of the September 10, 2024, ABC News presidential debate, Linsey Davis and David Muir, each respectively have histories of demonstrating left-leaning biases. In 2020, Davis implied that Hillary Clinton had actually won the 2016 election, asking the 2016 Democratic candidate if it would have been easier to lose the election outright rather than to "have really won, but still lost."⁴ Muir, likewise, has long aligned himself with the left-leaning agenda. On July 24, 2024, Muir claimed that "many people in this country" had "gratitude" for President Biden stepping

¹ Philip Bump, "A New Measure of Americans' Deep Distrust of the Media," Washington Post, June 26, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/06/26/new-measure-americans-deep-distrust-media/>.

² "ABC News (Online) Media Bias Rating," AllSides, accessed September 17, 2024, <https://www.allsides.com/news-source/abc-news-media-bias>.

³ Brian Flood, "David Muir's ABC Newscast Was 100% Positive about Harris, 93% Negative about Trump Ahead of Debate: Study," Fox News, September 13, 2024, <https://www.foxnews.com/media/david-muir-abc-world-news-tonight-100-positive-about-harris-93-negative-about-trump-ahead-debate>.

⁴ Kristine Marsh, "ABC Slobbers over Clinton: Must've Been Hard to 'really Have Won' in 2016 but Still Not Be President," MRCTV, March 4, 2020, <https://www.mrctv.org/videos/abc-slobbers-over-clinton-mustve-been-hard-really-have-won-2016-still-not-be-president>.

down “when democracy needed it.”⁵ Muir implying that the Republican Party and the candidate at the top of its ticket are a threat to democracy is disingenuous, especially when the current Democratic presidential nominee won zero votes during the 2024 Democratic primary season. For these reasons, across both the ABC Network itself and the moderators of the September 10th debate, it is understandable that President Trump expressed hesitancy in the prelude to the debate, stating that he “[didn’t] like the idea of ABC” hosting the event.⁶

On debate night, it became abundantly clear that ABC News and its respective moderators had a biased agenda. Over 67 million Americans⁷ watched as a policy exchange between two presidential candidates quickly turned into a three-on-one debate against the Republican nominee. Davis and Muir repeatedly fact-checked President Trump in real time regarding his arguments, refuting his claims on topics such as the availability of late-term abortions and the effects of thousands of Haitian immigrants on the town of Springfield, Ohio.

Vice President Harris, however, did not receive the same treatment. At one point during the September 10th debate, the Vice President claimed that President Trump had left the United States with the “worst unemployment since the Great Depression.” Rather than correcting Vice President Harris in real time by contextualizing the economic situation the Biden-Harris Administration inherited in the turmoil of the Covid-19 pandemic, or by replying that only 19 percent of Americans believe they are in a better financial position since President Biden took office,⁸ Davis and Muir sat silent and allowed the Vice President to distort the truth.

Shortly after this exchange, Vice President Harris claimed that “there is not one member of the United States military who is in active duty in a combat zone, in any war zone around the world, for the first time this century.” Instead of remaining silent, as the ABC moderators did, Davis and Muir should have fact-checked the Vice President by asking her to tell the families of the three U.S. soldiers killed by Iranian-backed Iraqi militiamen on January 29, 2024 in Jordan that their fallen loved ones were not deployed in a combat zone.⁹ Additionally, Davis and Muir could have brought up the seven American soldiers injured during a September raid on ISIS militants,¹⁰ the eight American servicemembers who received traumatic brain injuries following a drone attack on their base in Syria,¹¹ or the roughly 50,000 American men and women deployed to the Mediterranean and the Middle East receiving “imminent danger pay”¹² to defend our ally, Israel, who now faces threats on multiple axes due to the Biden-Harris Administration’s weak on Iran policies.

⁵ Geoffrey Dickens, “The Worst of ABC’s Debate Moderators Muir and Davis,” Newsbusters, September 6, 2024, <https://newsbusters.org/blogs/nb/geoffrey-dickens/2024/09/06/worst-abcs-debate-moderators-muir-and-davis>.

⁶ Brett Samuels, “Trump Commits to Debating Harris, Would Be Willing to Do More than One,” The Hill, July 23, 2024, <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4788623-trump-willing-debate-harris/>.

⁷ Hadas Gold, “67 Million Watched First Harris-Trump Debate, Blowing Past Biden Matchup,” CNN, September 11, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/11/media/debate-ratings-abc-trump-harris-2024-election/index.html>.

⁸ “Financial Times - Michigan Ross August Survey - Topline - F08.06.24.PDF: Powered by Box,” Box, August 2024, <https://globalstrategygroup.app.box.com/s/k8otlzvi1vo0hu187vhaig40y6uhykxx>.

⁹ C. Todd Lopez, “3 U.S. Service Members Killed, Others Injured in Jordan Following Drone Attack,” U.S. Department of Defense, January 29, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3659809/3-us-service-members-killed-others-injured-in-jordan-following-drone-attack/>.

¹⁰ Eric Schmitt, “Sweeping Iraq Raid Killed 4 ISIS Leaders,” The New York Times, September 13, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/13/us/politics/iraq-raid-isis-leaders-killed.html>.

¹¹ Noah Robertson, “Eight US Troops Injured in Attack on Base in Syria,” Military Times, August 14, 2024, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2024/08/14/eight-us-troops-injured-in-attack-on-base-in-syria/>.

¹² Matthew Sedacca, “Families of Wounded Vets Rip Kamala Harris for Brazen ‘no American Troops in War Zones’ Claim as Own Admin Lists Many Active Combat Areas,” New York Post, September 14, 2024, <https://nypost.com/2024/09/14/world-news/vet-families-rip-kamala-harris-over-claim-no-troops-in-combat-zones/>.

Some commentators, including Democratic operatives such as Doug Schoen,¹³ an advisor to New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg, and Mark Penn, former top advisor to Bill and Hillary Clinton, have speculated that this strategy of fact-checking only President Trump may have been planned ahead of the debate and following coordination between the Harris campaign and ABC.

According to Mark Penn, fact-checking just one candidate would “rig the outcome of this debate.”¹⁴ Given the close ties between ABC executives and the Harris campaign, Americans are rightly wary, but do not know all the details of what was agreed to prior to the debate. For example, Co-Chairman of Disney, Dana Walden, who oversees ABC News, has donated money to Ms. Harris’s political campaigns since at least 2003, and the Vice President has described Walden as an “extraordinary friend.”¹⁵

For these reasons, I demand that you make public all correspondence, records, and potential coordination between the Harris campaign and ABC News ahead of the September 10th ABC debate. I also request you publish all internal ABC News texts and emails, both between ABC employees themselves and with the Harris campaign, to elucidate any potential biases that ABC News employees may have demonstrated prior to the debate between President Trump and Vice President Harris.

The American people deserve transparency and accountability from the mainstream media and a full accounting of whether ABC News coordinated with the Harris campaign to skew the debate’s questions and fact-checking in favor of the Vice President.

Please respond by September 27 with the requested information. I appreciate your swift attention to this matter and look forward to receiving your responses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roger W. Marshall". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator

¹³ Doug Schoen, “In the Trump-Harris Faceoff There Was a Clear Winner but Don’t Believe This Election Is Over,” Fox News, September 10, 2024, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/trump-harris-face-off-there-clear-winner-dont-believe-election-over>.

¹⁴ Nicholas Ballasy, “Former Top Clinton Adviser Calls on ABC to Launch Internal Probe into Whether Debate Was Rigged,” Just The News, September 12, 2024, https://justthenews.com/politics-policy/elections/mark-penn-calls-abc-news-launch-internal-probe-moderators-fact-checking?utm_source=mux&utm_medium=social-media&utm_campaign=social-media-autopost.

¹⁵ Michael Grynbaum and Brooks Barnes, “Atop ABC, a Personal Connection to Kamala Harris,” The New York Times, August 11, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/11/business/media/abc-debate-dana-walden-kamala-harris.html>.