

GLAAD, Fair Wisconsin: Fox news moderators and GOP candidates ignore the increase in anti-LGBTQ threats in the fist presidential primary debate

Posted on Thursday, Aug 24, 2023

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

GLAAD: “It is unconscionable, during this time of sharply increased anti-LGBTQ violence and threats—propelled by rhetoric from extremist politicians, Fox News, and many of these candidates—that the debate moderators offered up only one clumsy question about our community, and zero questions about the real issues facing the LGBTQ community.”

Fair Wisconsin: “From attacking transgender youth to threatening our bodily autonomy and freedom to vote, these extremists are using lies to divide us and turn us against each other as they attempt to obtain power. We must reject their dangerous lies about the LGBTQ+ community and push back against any politician who seeks to distract from their failure to deliver for all our families.”

(Thursday, August 24, 2023) GLAAD, the world’s largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) media advocacy organization, and Fair Wisconsin, the state’s LGBTQ+ civil rights and political advocacy organization, are responding to last night’s Republican presidential debate.

In advance of the debate, GLAAD and Fair Wisconsin sent a letter to Fox News moderators Brett Baier and Martha MacCallum encouraging them to include pressing LGBTQ issues in the debate, and offered up questions, included below. None of the recommended LGBTQ questions

were asked. GLAAD also published a primer on the anti-LGBTQ stances and records of the candidates.

The sole question from the moderators on LGBTQ issues misgendered transgender girls, calling them “biological boys.” Nikki Haley responded, “We’ve got crazy woke things happening in these schools... I will always fight for girls all day long... Biological boys don’t belong in the locker room.” Previously Haley falsely claimed that allowing transgender girls to play sports contributes to teenage suicide ideation. The claim is baseless.

Also during the debate, without basis, Ron DeSantis refused to answer a question about remedying American students’ low math and reading test scores, instead saying: “We need education in this country, not indoctrination... We eliminated CRT, we eliminated gender ideology.” In his tenure as Governor of Florida, DeSantis pushed through and signed the notorious “Don’t Say Gay” law prohibiting schools from allowing discussion about LGBTQ students, families, history, or issues in public school classrooms. He signed a ban on allowing transgender students to participate in sports as well as a law that prevents teachers from being able to use proper names or pronouns for transgender students without their parents’ explicit consent. In fact, Florida schools are experiencing a brain drain with qualified teachers quitting the profession, retiring early, or leaving the state over DeSantis’s policies.

Sarah Kate Ellis, President and CEO of GLAAD, responded below:

“It is unconscionable, during this time of sharply increased anti-LGBTQ violence and threats—propelled by rhetoric from extremist politicians, Fox News, and many of these candidates—that the debate moderators offered up only one clumsy question about our community, and zero questions about the real issues facing the LGBTQ community. The candidates were not asked about upholding marriage equality, about protecting LGBTQ students in school, about access to proven lifesaving healthcare for transgender people, about the record-breaking 500-plus anti-LGBTQ bills this year, about violence against LGBTQ people and allies, or about the warped priority of demonizing drag queens and LGBTQ books instead of going after the leading cause of death for young people in this country: guns. Instead moderators took the opportunity to misgender and insult transgender student athletes.”

Megin McDonell, Executive Director of Fair Wisconsin, said: “Last night we heard from some of the most notorious anti-LGBTQ+ presidential candidates who are

waging a dangerous war on our community. From attacking transgender youth to threatening our bodily autonomy and freedom to vote, these extremists are using lies to divide us and turn us against each other as they attempt to obtain power. We must reject their dangerous lies about the LGBTQ+ community and push back against any politician who seeks to distract from their failure to deliver for all our families. There's no debate about it—Wisconsiners have a proven track record of rejecting extremism at the ballot box, and we'll do it again in November of 2024.”

GLAAD and Fair Wisconsin offered moderators questions for the candidates including the following:

For Tim Scott: You said you consider homosexuality a morally wrong choice, like adultery. Will you be able to set aside your personal beliefs to protect the legal rights of LGBTQ people in this country?

For all candidates: Do you support marriage equality in the United States for same-sex couples?

FACT: Marriage equality has climbed to a record high support of 71% of all Americans, including 49% of Republicans.

For all candidates: Gun violence is the number one cause of death for young Americans, yet there's incredible focus on banning health care for transgender youth that the experts say saves and improves their lives. Do lawmakers have the right priority here?

FACT: There were more than 500 bills proposed nationwide targeting LGBTQ Americans, including transgender people and youth access to healthcare that is supported by every major medical association. (30+ statements here.)

For Mike Pence: You said you would again prohibit transgender Americans from serving in the military, as was the policy when you were vice president under Donald Trump, and cited “unit cohesion” as an area of military readiness affected by transgender personnel. Military leadership said unit cohesion did not suffer as a result of transgender personnel, but it did suffer because of the ban. Will you maintain your opposition to transgender personnel despite the views of military leadership?

For Vivek Ramaswamy: Your campaign website states that as president you would

sign into law a ban on health care for transgender minors if it reached your desk in the White House. Every major medical association in the U.S. supports such care for trans youth. Have you talked with parents of transgender youth about their lives and private health care decisions? Why is it a politician's place to decide what is best for these families?

For Nikki Haley: You've said teenage girls' mental health has suffered because transgender girls are allowed to play school sports. There have been more bills proposed about transgender people in sports than the number of transgender people in school sports. Where are you getting this from?

FACT: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released studies about a rise in suicidal ideation in teenage girls and LGBTQ students, but no connection was made between the presence of transgender youth and thoughts of teenage girls.

For Ron DeSantis: As governor of Florida, you signed and then expanded the so-called "don't say gay" law to include not just the earliest grades but all the way to 12th grade. What would you say to a gay 16-year-old, or a student with two moms, about why they can't talk about themselves or their families in school?

FACT: According to a 2023 study, nearly 1 in 3 LGBTQ young people said their mental health was poor most of the time or always due to anti-LGBTQ policies and legislation, and nearly 2 in

3 LGBTQ young people said that hearing about potential state or local laws banning people from discussing LGBTQ people at school made their mental health a lot worse.

For all candidates: How do you plan to protect LGBTQ people and supportive communities, rather than politicize them?

FACT: Studies have shown an increase in anti-LGBTQ discrimination alongside the rise in hateful rhetoric and legislation targeting LGBTQ people. The effects are not only felt by LGBTQ people. This past weekend a California woman named Lauri Carleton was shot and killed after her alleged killer confronted her about having a Pride flag in front of her clothing store. Lauri was an ally, not LGBTQ herself. She was straight and married, and a mother of nine.

GLAAD's guide on all the declared presidential candidates is available here: [Election 2024: Presidential Primary Candidates on the Record.](#)

Some 7% of Americans are lesbian, gay, or bisexual, according to Gallup, including 20% of GenZ, the youngest population cohort studied and most out generation in history. Polling and turnout analysis from the 2020 election indicate that LGBTQ voters played a deciding role in the victory of Joe Biden for President and in key battleground states, including in Wisconsin, flipping the state Donald Trump had won in 2016.

The results of the 2024 general election will have profound implications for LGBTQ people in Wisconsin and across the country. The Fox News primary debate was an important opportunity to discuss what's at stake and the LGBTQ records of the candidates. Media covering the debate should note the candidates' LGBTQ records.