

To Interested Parties:

The 2020 Democratic Primary includes a historically large and diverse field across gender, race, and sexual orientation. There are over 21 candidates vying for the nomination and voters are taking these early months to learn more about each candidate's background, qualifications, and vision for the country. The media plays a central role in educating the public about candidates, especially with such a crowded field. That is why it is critical that candidates are given fair exposure and media attention.

**However, the historic number of highly qualified women candidates in the race are given significantly less attention and media exposure than their male peers.<sup>1</sup> And when the media does focus on women candidates, there is often a default to sexist tropes about women in leadership or a lack of focus on the substantive backgrounds and policies of the women candidates.** Concerns about "electability" are often leveled at women candidates using metrics not considered for their male counterparts, for example.

It is the responsibility of the media to provide accurate, fair, and equal attention to every serious presidential candidate and to do so in a way that does not further sexist or racist stereotypes. The media must do more to make its coverage truly equitable and to not repeat the mistakes of the past, including in the 2016 election, that disadvantaged women candidates. Choosing to ignore the highly qualified women candidates, to force them to focus on questions about sexism rather than their platform, or to hold them to wholly different standards than their male counterparts, encourages a broader culture that refuses to recognize and respect women as leaders, hindering the advancement of true equality.

To that end, we the undersigned women's rights and progressive organizations make the following demands of media outlets reporting on the 2020 democratic primary:

- 1. Ensure that at least 50% of Town Hall and debate moderators are women, and 50% of moderators are people of color:** It was unacceptable that the recent New Hampshire Town Halls hosted by CNN on April 22 featured three male moderators but no women moderators.<sup>2</sup> Going forward, all networks should commit to having half of their moderators for debates and town halls be women and half people of color for both the primary and for the general election--with a focus on promoting women of color for moderator roles in particular.
- 2. Ask male candidates about issues that impact women including sexism, maternal health and mortality, abortion access, and sexual assault/violence:** Right now there is a sexual predator in the White House, abortion rights are under attack, and there is a maternal health crisis in this country, with Black women especially facing a maternal

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<sup>1</sup> [Buttigieg Was The Second-Most-Mentioned Candidate On Cable Last Week. Sanders Was The First.](#), FiveThirtyEight, April 15, 2019

<sup>2</sup> [CNN to host back-to-back town halls with five Democratic presidential candidates on April 22](#), CNN, April 11, 2019

mortality epidemic.<sup>3</sup> We need a candidate committed to protecting and promoting women's rights, but too often, only women candidates are asked about reproductive rights and justice, maternal health or mortality, combating sexism, and addressing and eradicating sexual violence--if these questions are even asked at all. Women make up over 50% of the electorate.<sup>4</sup> Journalists must ask male candidates about these issues.

- 3. Cover women candidates as seriously as you cover men:** As a recent study revealed, the media often covers women candidates significantly less,<sup>5</sup> and when the media does cover women candidates, the focus is often negative and less focused on the substantive backgrounds and policies of women candidates.<sup>6</sup> Media organizations must make a conscious commitment to cover women candidates as seriously as male candidates.

We recognize the importance of the media in disseminating information to voters. The media has the power to form and shape voter opinion on candidates and to even sway an election. This is why the media must desist in its sexist coverage of women candidates for president and ensure that the highly-qualified women in the race receive the same coverage as the male candidates in the race.

#### **UltraViolet Action and the undersigned organizations:**

All\* Above All Action Fund  
Color of Change  
CREDO  
EMILY's List  
Feminist Majority Foundation  
Girls for Gender Equity  
Global Justice Center  
MoveOn Political Action  
NARAL  
National Domestic Workers Alliance  
National Organization for Women  
National Partnership for Women & Families  
National Women's Health Network  
National Women's Law Center Action Fund  
NetGen America  
Not Without Black Women  
Pantsuit Nation  
Positive Women's Network-USA  
Progressive Change Campaign Committee

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<sup>3</sup> [Lost Mothers](#), NPR, accessed April 26, 2019

<sup>4</sup> [The Status of Women in the States](#), Institute for Women's Policy Research, accessed April 24, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> [Buttigieg Was The Second-Most-Mentioned Candidate On Cable Last Week. Sanders Was The First.](#), FiveThirtyEight, April 15, 2019

<sup>6</sup> [Women on the 2020 campaign trail are being treated more negatively by the media](#), Stonybench, March 29, 2019

She The People  
United We Dream Action  
Way to Win  
Women's March