

July 22, 2024

RJ Wakins

Owner

WHPR

160 Victor St.

Highland Park, MI 48203

Dear Mr. Watkins,

We are writing to express our deep disappointment in WHPR's inability to have an African American woman journalist as part of the panel for the upcoming debate featuring candidates for the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate on July 26.

Black women deserve a seat at the table. Period.

The Detroit area media market is the largest in the state of Michigan. It features a bevy of highly educated, trained and politically informed women journalists at news media outlets in print, broadcast and radio. To not have ONE serving on your panel is an oversight that we would not expect from a majority Black owned Television station located in a majority Black owned city serving our community.

Furthermore, this entire affair is not only excluding Black women journalists but excluding broad access to the community you purport to serve. First WHPR is holding a debate a full month after absentee ballots have been mailed out and many have already been returned. Second, the scheduled debate also occurs after early voting has started. Again, some voters will have already cast their ballot before hearing from the candidates on your platform. No one interested in reaching the largest number of voters would schedule a debate after they have already started voting.

In addition, WHPR management is denying voters access to watch the debate in person and ask questions. We have also been informed the station is further limiting voter access by not televising the debate. What kind of TV station hosts a television program of this importance but doesn't record and broadcast it live on TV?

Finally, as a broadcast station, WHPR is denying the wider press corp. access to the debate.

These restrictions are an outrageous affront to our democracy and voter participation in the democratic process. It must not stand.

We demand these restrictions be lifted immediately and a qualified, professional journalist be added to the panel line-up. Here is a partial list of highly qualified African American women journalists for you to select from to fill this role: Hilary Golston, Fox 2 News; Rhonda Walker

and Kimberly Gill, WDIV; Carolyn Clifford and Glenda Lewis, WXYZ; Karen Dumas, Columnist, Detroit News; Mildred Gaddis, Host, The Mildred Gaddis Show 105.9.

We can't believe we need to say this, but it deserves repeating, Black women deserve a seat at the table. Black voters deserve a seat at the table. Every voter deserves to bear witness to the important discussion about issues that will help us select our next Democratic Party nominee – in an overwhelming democratic region of the state.

We demand the following:

1. Secure an African American woman journalist as a moderator.
2. Broadcast the debate live with video.
3. Let people attend and ask questions.
4. Open the debate up to the press and let news reporters and cameras in the studio to cover this important part of the democratic process.

If you do not make these changes by **noon on July 25**, we urge candidate Hill Harper to not participate in an event that excludes Black women from having a seat at the table, limits voter access and denies the press an opportunity to cover a public debate on issues important to our community.

Sincerely,

Alisha Bell, Chair, Wayne County Commission Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence (ret.)

Glenda McDonald, Mayor, Highland Park Kelly Garrett, Mayor, Lathrup Village

Valerie Kindell, Mayor, Harper Woods Nicole Brown, Mayor, Ypsilanti

Lavonia Perryman, President, Metro Detroit Congress of Black Women

Leslie Love, former State Rep.

et al...