



School of Communication Studies
Schoonover Center 400
1 Ohio University
Athens OH 45701-2979
T: 740.593.4828
F: 740.593.4810
www.ohiocommstudies.com

TO: Chair Gavarone
Vice Chair O'Brien
Ranking Member Sykes
RE: FY2022-2023 State Budget – House Bill 110
FROM: Jerry L. Miller, Ph.D. - Ohio University
Chair, Outreach Program of Ohio Debate Commission
DATE: May 4, 2021

Chair Gavarone, Vice Chair O'Brien, and Ranking Member Sykes—I thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share my support to include funding for the Ohio Debate Commission in House Bill 110. I am Jerry Miller, Professor in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University and Chair of the Outreach Committee of the Ohio Debate Commission.

Public discourse has defined my career in higher education, and I am proud to be a founding member of the Ohio Debate Commission that has as its mission “to foster fair and substantive debates that encourage participation in our democracy.” The Ohio Debate Commission recognizes the fundamental role of “participation” in democracy, both in terms of debating candidates vying for support and the audience to whom the responsibility falls to weigh evidence, assess appropriateness, and cast a ballot in support of a candidate or cause.

Well-planned and accessible debates and forums are important events that enable voters to have their concerns addressed by political leaders and candidates running for office. Moreover, such events give candidates an opportunity to disseminate information, share and critique evidence, and express differing ideologies—fundamental actions that support the democratic process and provide voters with information they need to make informed choices at the ballot box.

Much research and news coverage of political debates has focused on presidential debates and much of this information points to the viability of these events as providing information to constituents. Recent social scientific studies on presidential debates found that watching presidential debates “was a strong and consistent predictor of learning candidate issue knowledge” (Boyle, 2012, p. 95) and those with more political knowledge learn more from these “information-rich” campaign events (Jennings, Warner, McKinney, Kearney, Funk, & Bramlett, 2020). A distinct difference between these national events and local and state-wide campaigns--candidate or issue--is the significance of place. When running for office or discussing legislation,

constituents are our neighbors, soccer coaches, or our child's or grandchild's teacher. And the topics of concerns are in our front-yard. In essence, state-/district-wide and local debates/forums address audiences that are intimately invested in the issues discussed and they have lived experiences that formulate their standpoints. Consequently, we should seek out more opportunities to come together and discuss the concerns all Ohioans face.

A goal of the Ohio Debate Commission is to encourage more opportunities for citizens to engaged with their elected officials at all levels of the electoral process—to make it a norm to take part in open dialogue with candidates running for office or vetting legislation.

My interest in debate and public address stems from my childhood in Kansas and participating in public speaking events in 4-H and my school's speech and debate program. Those early activities opened the door to collegiate speech and debate both as a competitor and coach for 18-years, most recently at Ohio University (Director of Speech and Debate from 1996 to 2005)—GO Bobcats!

I have benefited personally and professional by my involvement in academic debates. These skills are important far beyond educational practice. A fundamental skill--and practice--is to keep the audience in mind, to recognize their needs, and to accompany them in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Such activities are certainly more than a competition and state funding will provide consistent support in the mission of the Ohio Debate Commission to bring more Ohioans to the table and to share their concerns while simultaneously giving our elected officials an opportunity to discusses plans that impact the daily lives of their constituents.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to advocate for funding for the Ohio Debate Commission to be included in HB 110. I appreciate your consideration and I look forward to future conversations.

References

Boyle, T. P., (2013). 2008 presidential campaign media predictors: interest, issue knowledge and candidate likeability. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 21, p. 95-107. DOI: 10.1080/15456870.2013.773481.

Jennings, F. J., Warner, B. R., McKinney, M. S., Kearney, C. C., Fund, M. E., & Bramlett, J. C. (2020). Learning from presidential debates: who learns the most and why? *Communication Studies*, 71(5), p. 896-910.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2020.1807377>