



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Media Contact: Steve Rabinowitz

202-265-3000 (o); 202-494-7655 (c)

[steve@bluelightstrategies.com](mailto:steve@bluelightstrategies.com)

Washington, DC – In response to the performance at last night’s presidential debate in Cleveland, Ohio, executive director Keith Allred issued the following message:

No American needs a formal guide or analysis of last night’s debate. Each of us and a watching world could plainly see that it failed the most basic principles of civil discourse at an historic level. Engaging competing ideas on the merits is crucial in a republic because it leads to better decisions. That was one of the scores on which the debate was particularly disastrous. This year the country has confronted epic challenges heaped upon epic challenges. How will the candidates address them? Instead of substantive answers to that crucial question, we got personal insults and interruptions.

Both candidates harangued and bear responsibility for making this a debacle not a debate. Vice President Biden engaged in name calling that was beneath the eroded standards of our day. But President Trump instigated the raw course the debate took. Fox News moderator Chris Wallace pointedly and correctly called out the President Trump more than Vice President Biden for violating the rules to which they both agreed.

The National Institute for Civil Discourse raises its voice with the rest of the nation in calling for political discourse by all candidates that is worthy of the most successful republic in history as it faces an extraordinary set of challenges. We do that recognizing that many candidates up and down the ballot will likely fail to heed that call.

In this tumultuous moment, the American people will need to be the nation’s saving grace as they have in so many challenging times in our past. Because the key substantive questions about how we best address the pressing challenges of our day were left unanswered by the debate, we must examine for ourselves the candidates’ visions and policy proposals for how we get to a better place. If the candidates don’t engage in a substantive exchange of competing ideas, we should do that with each other. We should both advocate and listen, rather than ridicule, across differences. Then, we must follow the dictates of our own conscience and cast our vote, whatever the unusual obstacles in this surreal year.

We will also need to rise to the moment as a people in ways that go beyond our responsibility to cast a vote informed by substantive and constructive deliberation. Whoever wins, people of



good conscience will continue to have honest differences. To reach the full promise of American self-government beyond the election we will need to engage our policy differences constructively and dial down the malice and increase the charity we feel toward one another.

We are fellow Americans. We share the gift of self-government that was made possible by the sacrifice of many over the centuries. We must honor that gift so that government by the people endures.

### **About NICD, the National Institute for Civil Discourse**

*NICD works to build the nation's capacity to engage differences constructively. In 2011, the University of Arizona created NICD after the Tucson shooting that killed six people and wounded another thirteen, including former Cong. Gabrielle Giffords. In the weeks prior to the shooting, Giffords was already in discussion with the UofA about creating a center to study how to improve the quality of discourse. The galvanizing power of that event brought together founding honorary co-chairs George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton and an impressive bipartisan group of other leaders to honor Cong. Giffords' idea to work on these issues.*

*Our work includes a rigorous examination of civil discourse in presidential and senate debates: <https://nicdresearch.org/2020/06/18/civility-in-political-debates/>. We also offer Americans a variety of opportunities and resources to engage differences constructively at <https://nicd.arizona.edu/>.*

### **About Keith Allred**

*Keith Allred is Executive Director of the National Institute for Civil Discourse. He was recruited to lead NICD because he had recently launched CommonSense American, a new organization that brings Republicans, Democrats, and Independents together from across the country to find and champion solutions with broad support at the grassroots level. With over 20,000 members so far, CommonSense American continues to grow by more than 1,000 members per month. Prior to leading NICD, he was the first professor of negotiation and conflict resolution hired by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He started his academic career as a professor at Columbia. Keith earned a PhD in Organizational Behavior from UCLA and a BA in American History from Stanford. A fifth-generation Idahoan who grew up working summers on the family cattle ranch, Keith finished eighth in the world standings of the National Cutting Horse Association in 2017 after competing in the World Finals in Fort Worth.*

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