

This is my first post in my new role at the UC Berkeley Center for Law, Energy, and Environment, working on [Project Climate](#). Last year, as a Legal Planet guest blogger, I [wrote](#) that political will and scale are the two biggest challenges of climate change response. So for this first post, I want to take issue with the Democratic National Committee's decision –so far—to preclude a climate-change-centric presidential debate. Fifteen candidates have expressed support for the idea, and the topic has gained significant currency with the public at large. The DNC says that climate will be a topic in the debates generally, and that if they hold one issue-specific debate, they would have to hold many.

Yet, in four hours of the first two democratic presidential debates that took place in Miami – a location already impacted by sea level rise – climate received no more than fifteen minutes of discussion, despite the fact that many of the candidates identified it as the most important challenge for the next administration. Climate change also provides a stark divide between the political parties. One party sees it as an existential threat, the other isn't convinced that it is real. Trump famously has called climate change a Chinese hoax, promotes increased oil, gas, and coal extraction and use, and his administration has hidden and removed climate science from government websites.

Which brings us to political will. A focused presidential climate debate could drive extensive media coverage, focus interest, and clarify the huge gulf between the political parties. It's a rare opportunity for large scale education and a chance to make it into an issue of real voting consequence. Even a 45 minute segment of a longer debate would allow candidates to highlight their own approaches to climate change will contrasting the Trump administration's wholesale attacks on law and science surrounding climate change and impacts.

The DNC has a chance, by changing course, to impact political will in a meaningful way. Or it could continue to push climate change to the side, to everyone's detriment.