FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 21, 2020 Corrected

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AN OHIO DEBATE COMMISSION FORUM TO HELP VOTERS CHOOSE OHIO SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

CLEVELAND - The Ohio Debate Commission announced a candidate forum for the Ohio Supreme Court will be held Tuesday, September 22, 2020. Two seats are contested on Ohio’s highest judicial bench. The specific format for the forum is not yet set, but the forum will be held in accordance with public health requirements, either through virtual platforms or in a socially distanced, in-studio setting. A video of the forum will be made available free for broadcast and live-streaming, in order to reach as many voters and parts of the state as possible.

Karen Kasler, Bureau Chief, Ohio Public Radio & TV Statehouse News Bureau, and Curtis Jackson, News Anchor at Spectrum News will serve as moderators.

The ODC also has convened an advisory panel composed of two former Ohio Supreme Court Justices, Yvette McGee Brown and Judith Lanzinger, as well as retired Judge Ronald Adrine. The panel is providing format and content guidance to ensure coverage of meaningful topics without straying into areas judicial candidates are unable to speak on due to ethical concerns regarding cases that might come before them.

The candidates are incumbent Justice Sharon Kennedy and challenger, John P. O’Donnell, a judge on the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court, and incumbent Justice Judith French, and challenger, Jennifer L. Brunner, a judge on the 10th District Court of Appeals (Ohio) and former Ohio Secretary of State. Ohio Supreme Court general election races are nonpartisan. All campaigns are in conversation with the Ohio Debate Commission regarding participation.

Questions will come from the moderators and from members of the general public, who will be able to submit questions via YouTube and email from across the state. Questions will be selected and reviewed in advance by a committee of Ohio Debate
Commission members, and candidates will not be made aware of questions ahead of time.

The ODC’s plan directly addresses long-standing concerns around voter participation in judicial elections. Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor has been affiliated with Judicial Votes Counts since 2015, a nonpartisan effort to provide Ohio voters with information to make informed choices about judicial candidates.

In addition, polling conducted by Baldwin Wallace in March and April of this year show that nearly 75% of Ohio voters polled indicated they expect to vote in the Ohio Supreme Court races, about 69% of Ohio voters polled indicated they would like to know more or don’t have a lot of information about judicial candidates, and more than 75% of Ohio voters polled indicated they think it would be useful to listen to or watch a program with the state Supreme Court candidates.

“We recognize the importance of the seats and the high profile they will have as the only statewide races on the ballot this year. Especially during this pandemic, everything that can be done by candidates to help voters understand who they are and how they will serve should be done, and we are doing everything possible to honor the candidates and Ohioans,” said Dan Moulthrop, President of the ODC and CEO of The City Club of Cleveland. “With the network created by the members of this commission, we’ll be able to make sure everyone in every corner and community of the state has the opportunity to take full measure of the candidates before the November election.”

“Judicial races too often fly under the radar,” said ODC Executive Director Jill Miller Zimon. “We expect voter turnout will be high this year, and we’re going to work with our partners across the state to make sure these candidates get the attention they need so that voters can make an informed choice at the ballot box.”

Information about the submission of questions from the public will be released in August through social media and at ohiodebatecommission.org

The Ohio Debate Commission is a nonpartisan collaboration of civic organizations, media organizations, and universities started in 2018. It seeks to create the highest quality content for the highest statewide offices and distribute that content to every corner of the state. Its vision is a stronger Ohio, with well-informed voters and highly qualified public servants, candidates, and elected officials. The ODC is a 501(c)(3). Read more at ohiodebatecommission.org.

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