

2025 UF Student Government Debate

LEXI SEDEROPOULOS: OK. Good evening, everyone. Welcome to the 19th Annual Student Government Debate. My name is Lexi Sederopoulos, and I serve as this year's supervisor of elections. I'm very excited to get started tonight and hear from these talented individuals. We look forward to providing a comprehensive debate featuring the three executive tickets vying to be your next Student Body President, Vice President, and Treasurer. I hope tonight is a valuable experience and that all members of the student body remember to participate in our student body elections on February 25 and 26th.

Before we begin, I would like to take a moment to thank a few people who were instrumental in this process. Thank you to UF Information, Technology, Video, and Collaboration Services for their filming tonight's debate so that it can be viewed by students who are unable to attend. Thank you to the Campus Engagement and Student Government Advising and Operations team, especially to my advisor, Michelle, for her help throughout the election process and especially for her help in preparation for tonight.

Finally, I would like to thank and now introduce our moderator for this evening, Mr. Marna Weston. Mr. Marna Weston is a 1994 graduate of the University of Florida, receiving dual degrees in history and telecommunication. As a UF undergrad, he was involved in campus and community activities. He received the city of Gainesville's highest award for Diversity and Multicultural Awareness in 1991.

He also served as president of the UF Speech and Debate team. Mr. Weston has served as a moderator for many community debates, including ACCENT Presents Governor Richard Thornburgh and Michael Dukakis and, more recently, an ACCENT marijuana debate.

Mr. Weston serves or has served in a variety of campus positions, including commencement reading marshal, consultant to the Samuel Proctor Oral History program, administrative assistant to Upward Bound, instructor for public speaking in the Colleges of Agriculture, Class, and Warrington College of Business, and University Writing program instructor for the Progress slash AIM program. Currently, he coaches the Championship Speech and Debate programs at Lincoln Middle School and Eastside High School in Gainesville. Without further ado, here is Mr. Marna Weston.

[APPLAUSE]

MARNA WESTON: Good evening, Gators, and thank you, Lexi, for such a generous introduction. It's always wonderful to come back to this renewal of the tradition of alternating leadership and student government at the University of Florida, something that I kind of fell in love with here as a Gator, an undergrad, and I'm so excited to see that you have the same enthusiasm for it.

I'd like to remind you tonight that you're here in the audience, so you have an obligation to let those who are at home also enjoy what's going on. Gators everywhere will be dependent upon this show to know what's going on. So please recall and remember that with your decorum and behavior this evening. The motto of the University of Florida, of course, is *civium in moribus rei publicae salus*. The welfare of the state rests on the character of its citizens. So we're counting on your character tonight.

Both campaigns-- or all three campaigns-- pardon me-- will be granted a minimum of five minutes to deliver opening statements and three minutes to deliver closing statements. So at this time, I'll talk to you about those rules. One candidate per campaign shall be chosen by their campaign to give the opening statement and one to give the closing statement. This selected person may give both statements if the campaign chooses so.

Any of the specified executive candidates are eligible to speak during this time. The order for opening and closing statements was determined by a random drawing conducted by myself shortly before the debate. The results of the draw set the speaking order as follows. Vision will speak first. Watch will speak second. And Change will speak third. The speaking order for the questions will go in alphabetical order by campaign name and will rotate order for every question.

The campaigns will be provided with equal time to respond to each question. The time provided to respond to each question shall be two minutes. A one-minute period will be provided for the rebuttal and 30 seconds for a second rebuttal. All three parties can count on the fact that if there's anything that goes aside, I'll talk to everybody about making sure you have a second or something like that, so everything will be fair.

This pattern will remain constant for questions 1 through 9. For the 10th and final question, each party will be asked the same question and given two minutes to respond. There will be no rebuttal period for this question. Questions will be asked to the campaigns, and the campaigns will have to decide which candidate will respond to the question. Once the chosen candidate begins to speak, no other member of the campaign is allowed to respond to the same question during the two-minute answer period.

Rebuttal may be provided by a candidate other than the candidate who responded initially for any question. Any candidate who goes over the time will receive a warning. Upon receiving a third warning, that candidate will be removed from the debate. So let's not let that happen.

With the rules of the debate established and agreed to by all parties prior to the start of the debate, a final reminder is that we ask the audience to hold their applause until the end of the debate, except at this time where I encourage you to applaud loudly for whoever your candidate is.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you very much. That was very gracious. And now I invite a candidate-- or pardon me-- a representative from the Vision Party to give their opening statement.

JADE GONZALEZ: Good evening, Gators. I want to begin by thanking the supervisor of elections and the dedicated staff who made this debate possible. To everyone watching, both in person and online, thank you for engaging in this crucial conversation. My name is Jade Leonor Gonzalez, and I am honored to be running to serve as your next Student Body Vice President.

As a third-year, first-generation student majoring in Criminology and International Studies, I do not take my role on this campus lightly. From the moment I stepped foot at UF, I knew I wanted to leave my mark. My passion for leadership and service has shaped my time here. I've worked as a student admissions officer for the International Admissions Department, a student worker for the Florida Football Recruiting, and a student shadow for the Student Legal Services.

As a Florida Cicerone, I proudly represent UF as a student ambassador, connecting with future Gators and fostering school pride. In student government, I served as a sophomore class Director of Outreach and now serve as a junior class Vice President. But my most meaningful impact has been through cabinet.

Over the past two years, I've led a team of six directors and over 30 assistant directors, expanding leadership programming and launching the Career Development Cabinet, helping hundreds of students gain free headshots, LinkedIn education, and networking opportunities. I also led the first year Leadership Conference, connecting hundreds of freshmen with the tools they need to succeed at the University of Florida.

Alongside me tonight are Blake Cox and Johanna Moncy, two of the most accomplished student leaders at UF. We are here to share our vision for a more effective, inclusive, and results-driven student government, one that turns ideas into action. By the end of this debate, I am confident you will not only see what we stand for, but how we will continue to lead UF forward.

Johanna Moncy, your next Student Body Treasurer, is a third-year Public Health and Information Systems major. As agency head of Students Taking Action Against Racism, she tripled attendance, launched two new divisions, and expanded its curriculum to reach over 1,000 students, winning Agency of the Year for her hard work.

She also brings direct financial experience, having overseen finances for 10 affiliated organizations and large-scale cultural events through her role as Treasurer of Indian Student Association, connecting students from all corners of campus. Johanna was instrumental in securing \$5,000 in sponsorships for major events like Garba and Diwali, which host over 1,000 attendees and costs upwards of \$20,000. This hands-on experience makes her the perfect candidate to manage the student government budget and fight for student organizations.

Blake Cox, your next Student Body President, is a fourth-year double major in Agricultural Education and Political Science. A relentless advocate since freshman year, Blake has authored over 100 pieces of legislation, including a bill recognized as the most outstanding legislation in the Southeastern Conference last year. As Senate President and formerly as Senate President Pro Tempore and Budget Chair, he has delivered real change by expanding mental health resources and improving student organization funding. Blake knows how to lead, has built strong relationships with university administration, and is ready to implement this administration's vision for UF.

On this side of the stage, you have a team that understands how student government works, inside and out. We have the institutional knowledge, relationships, and leadership experience to enact meaningful change. And on the other side, a party that thrives on false narratives and empty gestures.

Tonight, the Change Party will present senate resolutions and call them accomplishments. But let's be clear. Resolutions are nothing more than symbolic statements unless followed by action. Time and again, Change Party has shown a pattern of passing resolutions only to let them fade into inaction.

What you won't hear from Change tonight is how under former Senator Naidu's leadership, they submitted 13,000 versions of the same exact bill, not to govern but to stall the Senate. You will hear how they push blatantly illegal bills, proving they have no grasp of real governance. And when they do introduce legislation, one of two things is always true. Either they knowingly push unconstitutional bills as political stunts or they propose performative policies that have zero impact on student lives. That's the idea of Change Party leadership.

But if you want real results, elect leaders who write real legislation, execute meaningful initiatives, and fight for student organizations. Time and time again, Vision Party has delivered. We identified the food insecurity crisis and launched Food for Fines, collecting over 4,000 pounds of food for students in need. We recognize that students need free access to color printing, so we're bringing it to the Reitz Union printing lab by the end of the semester.

We saw gaps in student government diversity and programming, so we wrote a bill to address it before even getting our names on the ballot. Because putting our initiatives into motion is simply what we do. We don't just talk about what needs to get done. We get it done. Blake, Johanna, and I believe that results chomp noise, and we are ready to lead this student body towards the real progress it deserves. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

MARNA WESTON: Thank you for your comment in opening, and I will remind the audience that applause will be at the end. You had that big applause at first, so no more applause, please, until the end. Thank you. It is now in order for a representative of the Watch Party to give their opening statement.

AJAY POORAN: Thank you. Good evening, Gators. My name is Ajay Pooran, and I'm honored to be Watch Party's vice presidential candidate for this spring election. Watch Party was founded by Alfredo Ortiz, myself, and many others, some of whom are here tonight. Alfredo has spent seven years in student government fighting for fairness and accountability. As Senate Parliamentarian and Chair of Oversight and Reform, he has worked tirelessly to restore trust after significant changes occurred in representation, like the creation of an at-large district to represent off-campus voters.

His experience as an independent District D Senator showed both he and those of us that formed the Watch Party how difficult it is for non-party candidates and third-party candidates to truly represent their communities. This is why we created the Watch Party.

For too long, the University of Florida's student government has prioritized loyalty over fairness. Controlled appointments and block voting have made it very hard for independent voices to break through. Those who try to challenge the status quo constantly face many different institution-related barriers.

The funding model for student organizations has shifted to a first come, first serve basis, which jeopardizes the stability of many groups, like the Hispanic Student Association and the Black Student Union. These organizations used to rely on district-based Senate seats to secure representation, but the transition to an at-large system has weakened their voices.

The voter dilution that has resulted from the adoption of this at-large system has made it nearly impossible for these organizations to work with minority parties or run their own candidates as independents and actually have a chance at winning any seat. We've already seen the consequences, which is why we do find it problematic that Vision Party has refused to attend the HSA debate, even as important issues like immigration affect Hispanic students directly.

Fair elections aren't just about politics. They're about ensuring that every student has a voice. If we let student government become less representative, we risk silencing historically underrepresented groups. That's why the Watch Party is ultimately committed to reform. And tonight we are focusing only on one issue-- fair elections.

We have four key policies for fair elections, including five seats allotted to District D, online absentee voting, satellite campus voting locations, and a \$250 public campaign budget. These four policies ultimately aim to create a fair, equitable, and inclusive electoral system.

Unfortunately, partisanship has stalled meaningful reform. The Change Party, which claims to support independent voices, has ultimately refused to work with us. Instead, they've prioritized political alliances over the students that they were elected to serve. They've even gone as far as to sign a power-sharing agreement with the Vision Party, undermining the power of the majority, their own independence, and the integrity of the ballot.

Fair elections shouldn't be a partisan issue. Every student benefits from a system where all voices are ultimately heard. The Watch Party is committed to transparency, fairness, and justice. We are doing the work that others have neglected. And if you believe in real change, consider joining us. Together, we can create a student government that truly represents all students. I yield the rest of my time. Thank you so much.

MARNA

Thank you very much. And now we will invite a representative from the Change Party to give opening comment.

WESTON:

ANAMIKA

NAIDU:

Good evening, everyone. I want to start off by thanking our faculty for organizing tonight's debate, as well as all of those in attendance. Your engagement today is what fuels our student government, and it's exactly why we're running. My name is Anamika Naidu, a third-year Political Science major pursuing minors in both Dance and Philosophy, and I am running to serve as your next Student Body President.

I'm the president of Beaty Towers area government, as well as the captain of my dance team, Gator [INAUDIBLE]. I served in Senate for over a year and a half, most recently serving as Change's Minority Party Leader. Serving on three different committees, I have overseen and authored countless pieces of legislation and forged a precedent of bipartisanship never before seen in the chamber.

To my right, Joaquin Marcelino, your next Student Body Vice President. A third-year immigrant Biochemistry, Chinese, and Political Science triple major, Joaquin served in Senate as Change's Deputy Minority Party Leader and Judiciary Committee Vice Chair. They are the Vice President of Education of the Asian American Student Union, one of the largest student organizations on campus. This past summer, they worked for Congress, advocating for health care access, drafting submitted legislation, and more.

To my left, Maximilian Banach, your next Student Body Treasurer. He's a fourth-year Electrical Engineering and Economics double major and the current Minority Party Leader of the Change Caucus. Max has served in the Senate for two terms and previously served as the Treasurer of the Engineering Leadership Circle. He has pioneered several on-campus infrastructure and transportation initiatives, fighting to increase access for all Gators.

Together, we are Change Party, the only party committed to real solutions for students. Looking around the room, there is only one ticket dedicated towards bettering the UF community. This past year, we've seen how Vision has prioritized self-interest over student needs. They continued their gerrymandered despite changes proposed democratic alternatives, writing your representation out of the fall election just to keep control of the Senate. They ignored student concerns about graduate housing, transportation, and rising university expenses.

Meanwhile, Change Party fights for real solutions, both in and out of student government, because students deserve better. When Vision opposes reform, we find creative ways to make change. When the RTS bus system was on the verge of getting defunded by Sasse's administration, not a single Vision off-campus senator cared enough to do anything, even going so far as to block the mayor of Gainesville from speaking to his constituents.

Instead, we got it done when Change senators such as myself, Pelton, Banach, Peters, and more authored legislation demanding our university preserve millions in funding. Working with student orgs, the city, and our students, Change Party successfully averted the proposed multi-million dollar cut to save our bus system that students rely on every day.

Tonight, our opponents will tell you about the numerous promises that they've kept, but I dare you to ask them about the promises they failed to keep. When you believed in Brinkman last spring, he voted to raise your dorm costs 4%, resulting in hundreds of dollars of added expenses. Blake Cox, a presidential candidate with a history of stalling the election results and hijacking the democratic process when Change won a majority in 2023.

Students deserve representatives fighting for them, not a vision dead set on filling their own pockets with SG salaries. Change Party doesn't just talk about progress. We take action. When students needed 24/7 Marston, Change did the research and got it done. And then as Vision watched, complacent when it became 24/5, Change authored the legislation to bridge the funding gap back to 24/7.

When students needed consistent transportation access and Vision did nothing about it, Change worked to preserve millions of dollars of funding. When Vision Party funded a record low number of student organizations, Change showed up and fought for funding to be increased, authoring a budget increase of \$10,000 to student organizations.

Vision Party has failed students at every turn. They claim to be your voice, but when have they ever listened? They claim to be for you, but their policies only serve themselves. Change Party is the only party actually working for students.

If you believe in affordable graduate housing, accessible health resources, improved student services, better transportation, a student government that listens to you, there is only one true choice on the ballot. Making change isn't just a vision, it's about putting in the work to make it a reality. Vote Change February 25 and 26th, and let's put the student back in student government. Thank you.

MARNA

Thank you, Jade from Vision, Ajay from Watch, and Anamika from the Change Party for your opening comments.

WESTON:

Very thoughtful. It's now in order to begin the individual questions to the parties. Our first question is to the Change Party. Given your platform's ambitious goals, which two initiatives do you anticipate will be the most challenging to implement, and how will you ensure transparency in tracking and communicating progress on these initiatives throughout your terms? You have two minutes to respond.

MAXIMILIAN

This is a really big question, and I think it deserves a big highlight in today's debate. The biggest thing that

BANACH:

Change Party is advocating for is ensuring on-campus graduate housing supply and to decrease the current two to three-year long waitlist. Currently, a graduate student could go through their entire degree track on the current UF housing waitlist without ever being sat in one of these affordable housing facilities that are oftentimes the only option for them to be able to attend our great university.

We are grateful, as Change Party, to have led a bipartisan, joined by independent resolution, calling for the university to preserve its commitment to graduate housing and to ensure that we can create new housing supply to take a dent at that waitlist we're currently facing.

The second issue is one that we will continue to fight for, and we've already mentioned in today's debate, and that is 24/7 libraries. We have seen Vision become complacent in their agreement and our agreement with them-- in their agreement with the provost, and they flat out will not consider our funding. That would only transfer about \$50,000 in student government funds to help supply a transition from 24/5 to 24/7.

Now, Vision will come up, and they'll tell you that students don't use these facilities as often during those times. But the question isn't about how many students will use them. It's about having these resources accessible for students. Thank you.

MARNA Vision Party, you may now have a one-minute rebuttal.

WESTON:

BLAKE COX: Thank you. Our platform is focused on what students truly need, and we derive these from the issues that students face. The two most important issues that students are currently facing are the mental health struggles and food insecurity. For this reason, there are many initiatives on our platform dedicated to alleviating these issues.

For mental health, we will work to get a Mental Health Day implemented into the quest curriculum to allow students to get some time off and focus on the promotion of mental health resources. We're planning on working through the Quest Department because these are the only classes that all undergraduate tracks require, so we can reach as many students as possible.

Additionally, we plan on promoting all the mental health resources we have to offer at preview, ensuring that all students are aware of our support system before their classes begin. For food insecurity, we will launch the Food for Fitness initiative through RecSports, allowing students to donate food in exchange for a guest pass to our recreational facilities.

Change Party consistently brings up 24/7 Marston in an attempt to lobby the votes of students, then insist on using their Activity and Service dollars to pay for it, despite it being a featured part of their platform for multiple--

MARNA I'm sorry. That is time. Watch Party, you may now have a one-minute rebuttal.

WESTON:

ALFREDO ORTIZ: I think that the mantra for this rebuttal is going to be that, without fair elections, all campaign promises are false promises. And what I mean by that is that Change can stand up here, and they can fight the good fight that they've been fighting for since as long as we've seen them be participating in elections for. But without a clear pathway to not just have a majority in the Senate, which is impossible under this map, and then be able to keep their majority, which we saw how that went last time, there's really nothing they can really promise the student body.

And on the other hand, we have to look at what Vision has to offer. And it's really hard for the student body to actually hold your executive ticket accountable when it's so hard for our individual votes to matter under the current map. So for that reason, our party is focusing on reforming the electoral map so that we can increase accountability against both parties.

MARNA Change, you now have a 30-second rebuttal.

WESTON:

ANAMIKA I ask Vision Party, why is it so bad that we run on Marston? Why is it lobbying votes? It's actually a resource that's extremely important to students all over campus. I want to pivot to the second part of this question really quickly, talking about, how will we communicate with the student body? Change authored a bill to create a Canvas page, an opt-in Canvas page, that students can access at any time to know what's going on with their student government, and Vision Party voted it down. So you guys can tell me how you plan on talking to the student body, because any way that we have, apparently, is not feasible, doesn't get through-- thank you.

MARNA

WESTON:

Our second question is for the Vision Party. Given the increasing concerns about student mental health and the impact of loneliness on academic performance and overall well-being, what strategies do you propose to create meaningful connections to help reduce feelings of loneliness among students? You have two minutes.

BLAKE COX:

We, as a student government, can do so much to support mental health. We will begin by working on student awareness because there is a large population that is unaware of many of the resources that we have to offer, and people cannot receive help if they don't know where to go in the first place. Working with the Health Affairs cabinet, we will partner with many of these campus resources to host events promoting these resources.

While I'm talking about cabinet, I'd like to talk on the large and insurmountable impact that our cabinet has to decreasing these feelings of loneliness for students struggling with mental health. Cabinet caters to many different populations and can connect them at students to really overcome these feelings of loneliness that we are seeing at increasing amounts on our campus.

Specifically, working with the Health Affairs cabinet, we're going to partner with many campus resources to host events promoting how students can become more involved with each other and seek help if they're struggling with mental health.

Another major concern that I work toward in my time on the Mental Health Ad Hoc committee is the availability of critical resources and crucial situations-- crucial emergency situations. Ideally, our promotion of these resources get the students the help they need before it is far too late. But we need to be able to provide support in case of emergency. Past that, there are many logistic issues that we've seen that we will work towards improving, such as the availability of these resources during summer terms.

Despite insisting on caring about mental health, when I re-established the Mental Health Ad Hoc this fall, only one member of the Change caucus requested to join. And that same member has yet to make a single meeting. Thank you.

MARNA

WESTON:

Watch Party, you now have a one-minute rebuttal.

ALFREDO ORTIZ: I think that there's an opportunity here to speak about how we can challenge loneliness, and that is at the state level and at the national level, as we've been seeing attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion funding. It is expressly stated in that acronym, or whatever we want to call it, that we might feel less-- sorry-- we might feel less lonely if we see people who look like us and if we have the same space and access to the spaces that we might not necessarily feel historically represented at.

So it feels to me like perhaps if the executive branch could focus a little bit more on creating safe spaces and preserving the spaces that we've been rallying around as a student body, like La Casita, that we can maintain a sense of cohesion in our identity groups. And I feel like that might go a long way.

MARNA Change, one-minute rebuttal.

WESTON:

MAXIMILIAN Blake, you mentioned how Vision Party is supporting mental health, whereas Change actually led the way for it.

BANACH: Under your Senate President Pro Tempore, this Mental Health Ad Hoc committee was abolished for months. And what did you do about that?

When you said Change senators didn't want to join it, it was because of your party's gerrymandering that left us with a super minority and left hundreds of thousands of students whose voices left unheard and left unrepresented. Change Party submitted 2024 1112 advocating for the implementation of campus-wide Mental Health Days passed by Senator Simone Liang.

The CIME was abolished and was the center for community and belonging for many different people, and now only certain organizations are the final line of defense for this. So how do you expect us to help support ourselves?

MARNA Vision. Oh, I apologize. Was that it? Thank you. Vision? Please go ahead.

WESTON:

MAXIMILIAN My friend Andrew passed away. Stop. OK.

BANACH:

MARNA If you don't mind just giving him 10 or 12 seconds to finish what you're saying. I interrupted him twice. Please.

WESTON:

MAXIMILIAN My friend Andrew passed away last year due to a car accident, and when I wanted to make a remembrance garden for him and actually erect a remembrance stone for him, there was nothing I could do because of the gerrymandering. I could not do anything because I was not a senator anymore. I was not able to represent my community.

MARNA Thank you very much, and I apologize. Vision, final privilege, 30 seconds.

WESTON:

JOAQUIN I'm very sorry to hear about your friend. And when we were talking about creating safe spaces, I was able to do that through my work with Star when we highlighted places like La Casita and the [? Simi ?] Office. And like Jade and I's work, cabinet creates community and caters to different populations like our First Gen Mixer and our Grad Affairs Mixers so that we can combat loneliness.

MARNA

WESTON:

Thank you. And, Joaquin, I do apologize for interrupting you. And my condolences for your loss, as well. It is now in order for our third question for the Watch Party. Over the last two years, students have expressed concerns regarding unemployment-- pardon me-- regarding employment limitations for students from various countries, the potential cancellation of in-state tuition for undocumented students, and perceived inadequate housing accommodations for graduate students. Given these ongoing conversations, particularly in the current political climate, how will you ensure that student government remains an advocate for all students? You have two minutes.

ALFREDO ORTIZ: Thank you so much for your question. I would like to begin by encouraging the student body to take matters into their own hands. And at the end of the day, I think that everybody here can agree with the limitations that exist within our government system. And there is only so much that political parties can do, one, at the campaign level, and then, two, should they be elected at the executive, legislative, and judicial levels.

That said, that doesn't mean that we cannot take a front and center position and talk to our constituents about how they can get involved, how they can organize, and try to promote some sort of resistance against these sort of concerns, which does bring me to a greater point. Recently, we've been seeing how it's becoming harder and harder for students to participate in debates as some civil rights era regulations were revived that make it basically punishable for you to participate in anything that can be construed as a protest, so long as you do that indoors.

We're going to have to organize as a student body to essentially push against that so that we can restore our freedom of speech in the spaces that they would be the most efficient. So that said, another thing that we need to take a greater look at is how these students who engage in protests are treated by the student police and what kind of charges are brought against them and the student honor court. We have to make sure that students do not have a fear for how they are treated in our university spaces, in order for them to have the comfort that they need to be able to make a stand and organize for themselves. Thank you.

MARNA

WESTON:

Change Party, one-minute rebuttal.

ANAMIKA

NAIDU:

Our student government has a history of pandering to the state government. I think that a big way to ensure that our student government is actually emphasizing the interests of the student body is to make sure that when we are passing things in the Senate, when initiatives are coming out of the executive, we have the student body in mind and no one else.

Oftentimes, this pandering leads to the prioritization of a political agenda over the interests of the student body. I want to highlight an example of Change's work in the Senate chamber, in which we moved away from this. A bill to protect graduate students from state attacks, 2024, 1066 resolution condemning SB 846 and its effects on international graduate students, authored by Change students, senators, and passed unanimously by the Senate.

I also want to juxtapose this by saying there was a time when we passed pass the Green New Deal, historic legislation, that we had a Vision senator go up in public comment and tell us that we shouldn't be passing things that the state government doesn't agree with out of fear, because what would they say? What if they pulled-- thank you.

MARNA Vision Party, one minute.

WESTON:

BLAKE COX: I'd first like to start by saying that our party represents all backgrounds and all students, including both the international and graduate students. Graduate students specifically are an incredibly important population on our campus, and they're often underrepresented in student government. I've already worked in my time as Senate President and Senate President Pro Tempore to ensure stronger representation for graduate and professional students in student government.

Since taking office as the Senate President Pro Tempore, graduate and professional seat retention has seen a steep increase, and this has continued throughout my Senate presidency. Additionally, I think it's important to have a good relationship with the administration for major issues such as this.

As student body president, I will continue to build on the good relationships that we have by focusing on collaboration rather than conflict. I believe it's crucial to work respectfully with university leadership, engaging in conversation that allows us to find common ground and mutual understanding rather than villainizing anyone, which is Change's bread and butter.

MARNA Watch Party, 30-second close on your question.

WESTON:

MAXIMILIAN BANACH: Ultimately, in order for everyone to be able to feel safe, respected and represented in their communities as a part of this student body, they need to have representation, not just through the current bipartisan structure. There needs to be other representatives, other parties at the table, including minority third parties, that can best represent and tailor to these individual interests, like the current two-party structure can.

MARNA Time. Thank you. Our fourth question is for the Change Party. As UF transitions to a new university president, what qualities do you believe are essential in this leader? And how will you advocate for student interests to ensure a smooth, student-focused transition? Two minutes, please.

WESTON:

ANAMIKA NAIDU: If I were to be-- if I were to be elected student body president, I would have a vote on who the next university president is. And as we've seen from Ben Sasse's administration, this is clearly a very crucial decision in how this affects our student body. We watched a university president blow our budget on things that aren't even related to this university's proceedings.

As previously mentioned by the opposition, yes, of course, it is important to work with your opposition. I did this greatly in Senate. But that being said, I will not be afraid to vote against something coming out of the Board of Trustees or go against the president if it is in the best interest of students, mainly lowering the cost of on-campus living expenses. I want a president who prioritizes that. Things are too expensive around here. Securing research funding for all majors across the entire school, not just for a department or two with the big donor. Those are things that students care about, fleshing out the on-campus facilities that we have here.

I want to pose a direct question to the Vision Party, because if I were in this role, I would also take into account what students want. Do they want this university president? Do they not? When Gator Party was posed that exact same question and the entire student body said, we don't want Ben Sasse, then president Lauren Lemasters voted yes on Ben Sasse anyway.

The students deserve to know, Blake Cox, if elected president-- if you were president, how would you have voted on Ben Sasse? And depending on what students say, how will you factor that into your vote on the next university president? I want to remind you that Blake Cox was party leader of Gator Party, the party responsible for voting yes via the students on Ben Sasse. So it is important to me, and it should be important to the student body. How will your next student body president vote, and how will that affect you? Thank you.

MARNA

Vision Party, you have a one-minute rebuttal.

WESTON:

BLAKE COX:

I would first like to say, by outlining what I believe is really important for the next president of the University of Florida, I believe it's very important to get someone who builds a strong sense of community on campus, a president who is not only reliable and accessible to students, but also down to earth and approachable, someone students can see as their advocate and maybe even their favorite professor.

This president should prioritize creating an environment where every student feels heard, valued, and connected. It's essential that the president remains open to student input and is actively involved in the campus community. This means engaging with students directly, being present at events, and listening to the diverse voices that make up our student body. By embodying these characteristics, the next president will foster a campus culture of inclusion, transparency, and mutual respect.

I would like to now respond to the question posed to me. If I were in the shoes of Lauren Lemasters, former student body president, I would have voted no on Ben Sasse. I will vote on the students want. If you put me on that committee, I'm voting how students want me to vote. Don't tell me what I would and wouldn't do. I know what I'd do, and I'd do what the students want. Thank you.

MARNA

Watch Party, one-minute response.

WESTON:

ALFREDO ORTIZ: We feel like this question falls outside-- falls too far outside of the scope of the question for fair elections. But I'm still going to answer it as far as I see it kind of overlap in the peripheries. And by that, I mean that when we come into negotiations with this new administration, we have to ensure that it will be the case that the autonomy of the student government and its procedures will be respected by the UF administration.

So if that means that the university student government decides to pass a land acknowledgment act, then it should not be vetoed. If we're going to assume the posture of, hey, the administration doesn't interfere in the affairs of student government, then it cannot be a in and out, depending on what the university's policies are. We have to make sure that, if the administration is willing to interfere in questions such as this, then it should, at a minimum, support the Watch Party in its cause to interfere for fair elections. And if they see something like at-large apportionment drowning out 14% of the student body--

MARNA

Time. Thank you for stopping. Change Party, 30-second final privilege.

WESTON:

**MAXIMILIAN
BANACH:**

All right. In response to what Blake mentioned, if their idea of community and belonging is preventing adequate funding to as many student organizations as possible through the reallocation of funds to these more important areas, and the last line of defense for DEI policies after the abolishment of the CIME is through student organizations, as we've already told you. I'm afraid I'm not sure I want to belong in Vision's community of the future. When it comes to working with a university president on these issues--

**MARNA
WESTON:**

Time. Our fifth question is for the Vision Party. ACCENT Speakers Bureau and Student Government Productions receive significant funding from student government to bring speakers and entertainment to campus. While there have been events where capacity was reached, given the low attendance at events like Nelly, A'ja Wilson, and Tim Tebow, how will you ensure these programs align with student interests? And what strategies will you implement to boost engagement and attendance at future events? Two minutes.

JADE GONZALEZ:Our administration is not going to sit here and beat around the bush. We acknowledge the talent acquisition programs and campus performances hosted by student government in the past have not consistently delivered to the level of engagement and attendance that UF students deserve. The truth is, events like this have faced challenges in drawing large student crowds for a while, and that is something that we are ready to face head on.

However, what sets us apart is that we don't shy away from this reality. We own it. Acknowledging shortcomings is the first step in real growth, and our administration is committed to correcting that. We understand that UF students want events that speak to them, reflect their interests, and deliver entertainment that are both engaging and relevant.

We are not simply going to throw up our hands and claim that we'll try harder. Instead, we are ready to have real conversations about what's not working for us. We'll listen to student feedback, evaluate which performers, events, and formats have had the highest levels of engagement, and shift our efforts towards those that will truly connect with students.

Additionally, we'll build stronger collaborations with student organizations to ensure we're amplifying existing campus communities that already have student engagement. We will hold all levels of student government accountable. If any programs fall short of delivering results, we are ready to take responsibility and lead by example.

Accountability isn't just a buzzword for us. It's a core principle of our leadership style. If elected, we will hold ourselves and other student leaders to the highest standard, ensuring that every initiative and event is to the level of excellence that UF students deserve.

Additionally, we are committed to championing viewpoint diversity and open debate. As student body vice president, I'll ensure that UF continues to be a place where students engage in meaningful and open debates. Thank you.

**MARNA
WESTON:**

Watch Party, you have one-minute rebuttal.

AJAY POORAN: For us, holding these programs to the highest standards means holding these programs to the standards of the people. In order to ensure that programs like the ACCENT Speakers Bureau and Student Government Productions aligns with what is interesting to the student body population and what the student body population wants at that very moment, we propose making the ACCENT Speakers Bureau chair and the chair of the Student Body's Government Production elected positions.

By making these elected positions that are on the ballot that people would get the chance to vote for, you could ensure that these organizations are held accountable to the student body, ultimately, and that if the choices made by the chairs and directors of these programs are not in line with what the student body ultimately wants--

MARNA Time. Change Party, you have a one-minute rebuttal.

WESTON:

MAXIMILIAN BANACH: Before I begin my time, could I have a point of personal privilege? Just silent time markers. That way, my flow isn't interrupted. Thank you.

MARNA Is that acceptable? Instead of saying 30 seconds out loud, he would rather not have the flow of his speech interrupted. So--

MAXIMILIAN BANACH: Thank you. I'm very grateful that the question of ACCENT and SGP came up before the debate today. Indeed, it has been the Change Party that, during the past two summers, has proposed consistently written amendments to allocate upwards of a quarter million dollars from the current budget for ACCENT and SGP towards other areas where the funds are needed most-- our student organizations.

However, when faced with these amendments in the Budget Committee that is controlled by Vision, they refused, and they continued the same level of funding. Indeed, when it comes to concerts such as the Nelly concert that was brought up by Vision Party, it is important to note that, in this instance, Nelly was brought onto campus against what the codes require.

Indeed, Nelly was known to have potential allegations that went against what is entitled the Saint Act, a bill that was meant to screen potential speakers coming onto campus to make sure we weren't wasting our student fees. But instead, during the censure hearings for the ACCENT and SGP speakers--

MARNA Max, time.

WESTON:

MAXIMILIAN BANACH: Thank you.

MARNA And I apologize before about the "he" instead of "they." Vision Party, 30-second final privilege.

WESTON:

BLAKE COX: Thank you. I would first like to respond to what the Change Party just said about their amendments to strike the budget of Student Government Productions and ACCENT Speakers Bureau. These amendments were done without any communication with the agency head, the student body president, or the Budget Committee. They just throw numbers out and hope it works.

I don't remember seeing any of you at any of the budget meetings. I could be wrong, but I've been to countless budget meetings. I don't remember seeing any of you at any of the big four hearings. Additionally, as student body president, I literally write the budget. I will be taking heavy looks into SGP and ACCENT in their budgets.

MARNA Time. Our sixth question-- yes.

WESTON:

CREW: [INAUDIBLE] tapping on the microphone, please. [INAUDIBLE].

MARNA Thank you very much. The point has been made that we should refrain from tapping, and I've been doing some
WESTON: tapping up here myself too, so I apologize. I'll put that away. So we'll be more careful with that. Are there any other housekeeping issues?

CREW: Is everyone else OK with not announcing times while you're speaking?

[CHATTER]

MARNA OK, so one party would like-- just hold it up half a second longer. Thank you. Appreciate it. All right, now back to
WESTON: the business. Our sixth question is for the Watch Party. Given the inherent challenges that arise from the executive and legislative branches often operating with different priorities, fostering effective collaboration is crucial. How will you work across party lines to prevent potential stalemates that could impede progress on critical student issues? Two minutes, please.

ALFREDO ORTIZ: Thank you so much for your question. I am honored to have been serving as the chairman of the Oversight and Reform Committee, and the political composition of that committee was split evenly across the majority party, the minority party, and the third parties that existed, as well as some members from the media. And-- well, as it stands out, my ad hoc committee was not the only one to produce legislation, as far as I know, but we were also the only one to be able to effectively meet quorum.

So I feel that with-- in order to promote bipartisan efforts or really multi-partisan efforts, what really matters is that people understand that the person at the end of the table is willing to give everybody a fair shot. I, for one, gave each member of my committee veto power over anything that came out. So consensus was mandatory.

Another thing I'd like to say is that the student body president does have the power to call special meetings of the Senate, which they can use in order to try to drive some force behind their legislative proposals, because at the end of the day, we do still respect checks and balances, and we can't rule like a dictator would.

That said, I'm really not too concerned about the issues that may come out of the legislature. Even though we are the party for fair elections, the current at-large model essentially guarantees that whatever party has the majority will end up being able to push their legislative agenda through the Senate. And that's not necessarily what's wrong with the map. What's wrong with the map is that it eliminates representation for District D entirely. So if we were able to keep at-large model and just reserve five seats for District D, which has been a politically cohesive group since 2017, then we will be able to protect the integrity of our electoral system without compromising whatever comes out of the Senate in terms of consensus. Thank you.

MARNA Change Party, one-minute rebuttal.

WESTON:

MAXIMILIAN

BANACH:

The discrepancies between the executive and the legislative branches' priorities is often due to partisan differences. However, in student government, we must neutralize the playing field and understand what the actual issues are at hand, what students want, and what their issues are. We mustn't be actually personally benefiting from this, and that is why our ticket wants to make a pledge to give up our salaries, if elected into office, and donate them to student organizations, of which we will sign now. It shall be our vindictive effort to not benefit from our stations monetarily, but rather for love of service to a community we care about. And I challenge Vision to do the same.

MARNA

WESTON:

And that is time. Vision Party, one-minute rebuttal.

BLAKE COX:

As a senator who served through the gridlock era, I've seen how much it hurts both those serving and the student body. When there was mass gridlock in the Senate, many executive agencies and cabinets were unable to get to work until far after the beginning of the administration's term, which hurts the student body greatly.

I was a senator during this time, and I used my bipartisanship to work with both parties to ensure that these student leaders were able to get approved and get to work. Johanna was one of those student leaders whose nomination was delayed due to gridlock. So this ticket understands what it is like to be on the other side and will do all that we can to prevent gridlock.

Change was the party creating mass gridlock in the executive branch, even attempting to extort me and my colleagues to reallocate a million dollars of student and activity service fees illegally so that they could complete their platform, a plan that you, Joaquin, had no issue with at the time.

MARNA

WESTON:

Watch, 30-second final privilege.

AJAY POORAN:

Ultimately, the Watch Party does believe that multipartisanship and pluralism, when present within both the legislative and executive branches of government, will ultimately hold all parties accountable, not just because we'll have multiple voices and perspectives in there to keep everyone accountable and multiple sides of the story to ultimately get out and reach the student public, but--

MARNA

WESTON:

Time. Our seventh question is for the Change Party. What role do you believe student government should play in advocating for students at the local, state, and national levels? And how do you plan to navigate political challenges while effectively advocating policies that benefit the student body? Two minutes.

ANAMIKA

NAIDU:

Change Party is no stranger to creating progress in the local and state communities. I want to highlight something that I opened with in my opening speech, the way that Change Party, in conjunction with the community, worked to restore the multi-million dollar budget cuts that were going to take place to RTS, something that benefits all students on both sides of the aisle.

If I were to be elected student body president, there is an agency under my presidency called External Affairs, and their job is essentially to communicate with the state and federal governments and essentially work with them to get things for students. I plan on utilizing these agencies, and I also plan on getting students at the ground level involved.

I want regular town halls. do students want to see from these agencies? What do they want us asking the government? How can we back that up in Senate? Not only how can we do it in the executive, but how can we also pass resolutions to conjoin these efforts between the executive and the legislative to actually drive progress?

Change Party was blocked in terms of progress by the Vision Party when we tried to use legislation and activism to restore the RTS budget cuts. We had to get creative, and we did. I have no doubt that if my administration were to take office, that we would be able to follow the exact same blueprint in communicating with students, communicating with local governments, really getting to the bottom of things, and publicizing them, advocating for them, advocating for students the same way we did for the buses, the same way we are going to do to lower living costs on campus, the same way that we are going to do to ensure that DEI is achievable for all students, and the same way that we are going to support every single Gator in the student body. Thank you.

MARNA Vision, one-minute rebuttal.

WESTON:

JOHANNA Our role in local and state politics begins with understanding what student government can do. I am
MONCY: unbelievably proud of the civic engagement that we saw this past election, with over a 99% engagement at the Reitz polling location. We will also champion initiatives from the External Affairs Agency to educate students on Florida-specific issues and how they are affected by these issues.

We are working with the External Affairs Agency with initiatives that are consistent to our platform, such as mental health, food insecurity, and affordability. This is-- working on these platform points affects local issues and state issues and what affects the students, and we know that we can do this instead of just trying to throw out bills and not have them stick.

MARNA Watch Party, one-minute response.

WESTON:

ALFREDO ORTIZ: Once again, we are the party for fair elections. This means that what you decide to do with your vote at the student, local, state, or federal level is up to you. And we are only here to help you be able to do that in a way that adequately represents your political will and interest.

That said, there is a pretty big barrier to political involvement at the University of Florida, and this includes the local, state, and national levels. And that is that if student government is going to be negotiating with these different levels of government, then the student body must know what it is exactly that the students want.

And currently, with the campaign restrictions that we have, we can't campaign outside of the election cycle. It's really difficult for parties and the people who make up those parties, or even independent candidates and voters themselves, to be able to tell their elected representatives outside of this election and whatever election date it is that they actually want them to be fighting for at the national level. So we need to repeal those campaign restrictions in order to bring accountability to what our actions are in negotiations with the federal government.

MARNA Change, 30-second wrap-up on your question.

WESTON:

JADE GONZALEZ:I find it interesting that vision wants to talk about civic engagement here on campus. While I am proud of that turnout, we are all aware that Chomp the Vote, an agency under Vision, goes widely unnoticed to the student body. I also want to point out that when they mentioned that we throw out bills and hope things stick, actually, Vision blocks our bills, just like they did with RTS. So we went out into the community, and we got it done. Vision can't even talk to the mayor in a Senate meeting.

How do you think they're going to cooperate with local and state governments? They do as they're told. They don't negotiate. They do as they're told. And the student body deserves better.

MARNA Time.

WESTON:

JOHANNA I yield.

MONCY:

MARNA Our eighth question is for the Vision Party. With no planned increase in the Activity and Service Fee, the A&S
WESTON: fee, for the 10th consecutive year and rising costs in A&S-funded areas, how will you ensure that student government allocates funds effectively while meeting the evolving needs of student organizations and services?
Two-minute response, please.

JOHANNA To meet the needs of student organizations, the biggest thing we need to do is educate our student
MONCY: organizations. Our party represents countless student groups with a variety of interests and recognizes the need to uplift every student organization to be their best. And to do this, our main goal is outreach.

Our student government process might leave students feeling lost when they don't have enough funding or don't understand the rules, but our administration, we want to make the process easier for all student organizations. Our platform includes an in-person option for the student government finance presentation to help student leaders understand the funding process and what exactly they can do with their funds and reviewing organization spreadsheets before the funding form opens to reduce denials.

Our party aims to not make student organization of funding a dead end for students, but to also connect them to sources that can help if they don't receive enough funding. Instead of illegally allocating funds to particular organizations like Change Party has tried in the past, I plan to host workshops to effectively find outside funds through sponsorships, furthering US connection to the Gainesville community.

The Treasurer's Office can and should be a resource center for all student organizations, especially when they are struggling. And reaching out to all student organizations with the opportunity for this extra help would allow us to not favor certain organizations over others and allow them to know how to fully use their funding.

MARNA Watch Party, one minute.

WESTON:

ALFREDO ORTIZ: As far as the budget goes, there's not a lot that we want to say, hence why we don't have a treasurer candidate. But we do come up here with a challenge for both parties that do. And that is, I would like each party to take the opportunity to-- before their constituents commit, that no new map will be-- sorry-- that no new budget will be approved, no new budget will survive a veto, until a new map is created that represents District D. I yield the rest of my time.

MARNA Change, one minute.

WESTON:

MAXIMILIAN All right. I'm grateful that the question of funding has once again come up in the debate. It's important to
BANACH: recognize, as the moderator rightly pointed out, that we haven't raised the A&S fee. I want you all to do a thought experiment with me now. When you learn about budgets in, say, AP Macro, there's discretionary spending, and there's needed spending.

Instead of searching for outside funds as Vision is trying to claim as the best option, I say there's a really easy discretionary fund where we're wasting tens of thousands of dollars not just each year, not just each semester, but monthly, on speakers with attendance oftentimes below a quarter of the venue they're sat at, for example. Nelly.

It's important moving forward that we have a candidate who has already worked with the 800 codes and amending how money is spent here at the university, which is why I've already worked with the prior budget chair to amend the 800 codes to institute a usage requirement so that as many organizations are getting funding and those organizations receiving funding--

MARNA Time.

WESTON:

MAXIMILIAN --are the ones using it. Thank you.

BANACH:

MARNA Vision, 30-second final privilege.

WESTON:

BLAKE COX: In her opening statement, former Senator Naidu said that I hijacked the democratic process, and that made me remember a time when I was the Budget and Appropriations Chair. The Change Party abused their power to illegally amend the Activity and Service fee budget, passing an amendment with a minority of senators present, causing massive delays in putting the funds of many important areas of campus, including the student organizations they claim to care about, into limbo. Additionally, Minority Party Leader Banach brings up AP Macro because I believe that's his only experience to be SBT.

MARNA Stop, please. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, the house will be in order. Thank you. Our ninth question is for
WESTON: the Watch Party. If you could highlight one underutilized SG service or initiative that more students could take advantage of, what would it be? And how do you plan to increase its visibility and engagement across the student body? Two minutes for the response.

ALFREDO ORTIZ: Well, I would say that one underutilized resource under the president's purview would be the Satellite Affairs Executive Secretary. And I bring that up because, as we mentioned in our opening statement, satellite campuses, there's thousands of students there who still pay into the budget that we were just now talking about, but they have no real access to cast a vote in a way that grants them any sort of real representation in our Senate, which is, of course, the people who are in charge of constructing the budget.

So something that I would do, or something that I would encourage all parties to take a deep look at, is the possibility of using the Satellite Affairs Agency in order to create polling locations at the satellite campuses so that people can actually cast their vote in person without having to depend on the absentee ballot process. Because we don't know-- and we've seen before that sometimes those ballots get lost or they don't get delivered on time.

And there's a million other things and issues that people have with the absentee ballot process, like, Who is going to open my ballot when it gets there? Is a picture of this going to get leaked in any shape, way, or form? Maybe not because they pursue malice on the part of the Supreme Court, but because we don't know who these ballots are going to be handled while they are in transit.

So by creating these polling locations there, we have a defined presence that brings to attention of these satellite students that elections do occur, that they do have a right to vote and participate in them, and that they have the right to do so in a way that is secret and secure. Thank you.

MARNA Change Party, you have a one-minute rebuttal.

WESTON:

JADE GONZALEZ: I truly think one of the most underutilized resources under the presidency is external affairs. We are at some of the most politically polarized times in this country, and a lot of times we see the repercussions of this from the state government disproportionately affect those in education. And especially recently, it has been higher education.

I think if students really understand the pull, the weight that our president, our executive, has on local and state and even federal governments, it would be much easier to get students involved at the grassroots level, find out what they want, what can we advocate for, and what can we get done? What's actually within our purview that would actually affect students? And a lot of times, it comes down to education.

So using external affairs to talk to the state government, to make sure that these protections for majors, for classes, for programs, for scholarships stay in place is by far the most important thing that students don't know about that we do in the executive. I yield.

MARNA Vision Party, you now have a one-minute rebuttal.

WESTON:

ANAMIKA NAIDU: As a prelaw student and also as a first-generation student, I've had the honor of exploring a lot of our different resources on campus, whether it's just tabling outside or even just through my involvement in the Student Union. The Student Legal Services Office is probably one of the most underseen resources that student government oversees.

As a prelaw student, I've shadowed for them for the last two years, and I've had hands-on experience. I sit on meetings with students every single day who are going through real challenges, and it's something that is coming out of the student government budget. So it's definitely something that is available to all students. And it also removes the barrier of having legal service for students across campus that it's definitely just not feasible for. So it's definitely something that I think students are seeing past. And if you're wondering, it's in the Reitz Union.

MARNA Watch Party, 30-second rebuttal to wrap it up.

WESTON:

ALFREDO ORTIZ: While all these agencies within the student government do provide tangible benefits to UF students, ultimately the franchise of all UF students is what's key to us here and what should precede everything else. And for that reason, students at satellite campuses right now face barriers to voting. And we do want to set up local polling stations on all UF campuses, ensuring that--

MARNA Time.

WESTON:

ALFREDO ORTIZ:--every student can vote.

MARNA For the 10th and final question, each party will be asked the same question and given two minutes to respond.

WESTON: There will be no rebuttal period for this question. The question is, reflecting on your leadership experiences, please provide an example of a time when you had to make a difficult leadership decision. What did you learn from the experience? And how has it shaped your approach to leadership, particularly in the context of serving a diverse and dynamic student population? Change Party will go first. Two minutes to respond.

ANAMIKA NAIDU: I served as party leader of the Change Caucus for eight or nine months. Something that I did have to do has been mentioned on this stage, and it's submitting lots and lots of amendments to garner attention for something I was trying to work on in Senate. We had a policy, the Senator Vacancy Integrity Act, and it's that when you leave your seat, you, as the senator leaving, get to name a replacement senator. It preserves the democracy involved in you getting elected, preserves the partisan makeup of the chamber.

And when the other party tried to repeal this, this is something that would seriously disenfranchise students all across campus. For example, if I got voted in by change Voters, and as soon as I left my seat, the majority party filled my seat with someone from Vision, disrespectful to the voters, disrespectful to their representation.

So we submitted these amendments. We submitted tens of thousands of them. Because this is my first meeting as party leader, and they were already trying to stomp all over me. What I learned was that it's OK to stand my ground when I know that what I'm doing is in the best interest of the student body. It's OK, because I was fairly elected to be here, just like I was fairly put on this stage. I don't have to feel bad for taking up space, and I don't have to feel bad for advocating for the student body.

It is not my fault and it is not the student body's fault that the other party is constantly putting themselves first. Every student at this university needs to know that their voice matters, their vote matters, because these policies matter. And that is really what I learned that day, my first meeting as MPL. I'm allowed to do these things, and I'm allowed to take up space because I know what I'm doing is the best for the student body.

And it is through that experience being MPL that I know that I am ready. These two individuals sitting next to me, also have serving in party leadership, are ready to take on this administration and serve the student body. Thank you.

MARNA

Vision Party. Same question, two minutes.

WESTON:

BLAKE COX:

When I served as the chairman of the Budget and Appropriations Committee, the student organization funding process was a very hot topic, as it still currently is. It's a very delicate process and something where it needed changes. Probably the hardest decision I've had to make is, when writing legislation, understanding how these changes affect student organizations, how adding money to one line item might take away from another student organization.

So I constantly reached out to tens and tens of student orgs, trying to figure out what would work for them, what would be great for them. And this led to what I believe to be my greatest strength as a leader, which is the ability to communicate effectively and build consensus. It was instrumental in achieving one of my proudest accomplishments, the Bipartisan Base Funding Bill that increased student organization funding to \$1,000 plus inflation semesterly. In all of my roles, I've worked across party lines, engaged with student leaders and ensured that legislation is delivered to provide tangible support to student organizations and students all across campus.

The student body president serves as a very powerful advocate for students, representing their interests to university administration, local and state leaders, and beyond. They have the ability to create impactful programs, enhance student resources, and open doors for professional development, ensuring that every Gator has the support and opportunities to succeed when needed.

This is why it's important to have a student body president who's actually qualified for the role. I've served in Senate for four years in roles such as the Budget and Appropriations chair, Senate President Pro Tempore, and currently as Senate President. In each of these roles, I have worked tirelessly for the students, and I will continue to do so as your next Student Body President. When it comes to who's the most qualified for the role, I have more experience than all of my opponents combined in both the executive and legislative branch. Thank you.

MARNA

Watch Party, two minutes.

WESTON:

ALFREDO ORTIZ:

The decision to create a third party is not an easy one. It involves you having to split from potential friends, some people who will come to judge you because, well, why can't you just toe the party line? And to this, I have to say that the biggest lesson in my seven years being in the third-party candidate is that you have to learn how to be brave. You have to learn when to take a stand.

Because at the end of the day, it is up to you. It is you who holds the positions. It is you who have the power. And it is you who have the responsibility to do something when you see something is wrong. Now, I've spoken to many of you. I won't say who, but I've spoken to many of you about the fairness of the current electoral system. And there is bipartisan appeal and support for a change to be made. It's just that, unfortunately, we didn't have time to do it in time the last time that negotiations were going around.

That said, it's been a year since then, and there's been enough time since then. And I understand it's a scary change because it involves having to pick a new map, and you don't know exactly how that might affect you or the people that you represent. But a change is necessary because the current model has no legitimacy. And just how I had to stand and make the difficult choice to say goodbye to all the friends that I had in both parties to start my own, you should do the right thing. Use your positions to make the right call and do what you need to do to make sure that the people in District D have a fair shot at making their voices heard in the Senate. Thank you.

MARNA

WESTON:

Gator Nation, it's been an impactful evening. Some incredible comments by all of the candidates. And at this point, we're going to now conclude the question portion of the debate and move into closing statements. They will proceed in the opposite order in which the closing statements of the parties were delivered. Therefore, it will be first Vision, then the Watch Party, Change Party. They will have three minutes each. Please, again, remember to hold your applause, and we'll give everyone a great applause at the end. I now invite a representative from the Vision Party to begin with their three-minute closing statement.

BLAKE COX:

I would like to begin by thanking the supervisor of elections, Lexi Sederopoulos, Moderator Weston, and SD Advising and Operations for hosting tonight's debate. I'm Blake Cox, and I'm running for student body president because the students deserve someone who is qualified and who will fight for what the students want to see. Vision follows through on our promises, and we get the job done.

When you take a look at Jade, Johanna, and I, you see three people with a collective experience to run our student government five times over. Personally, I've served in both the executive and legislative branches of the student government for the past 3 and 1/2 years, including currently as your Senate President. In this role, I fought for each and every single student, and I will continue to do so as your next Student Body President.

Jade serves the student body as the Cabinet Leadership and Service Chair, Florida Cicerones as their Recruitment Chair, and as your junior class Vice President. Johanna has held roles on the executive board of the Indian Student Association, as well as serving the Students Taking Action Against Racism Agency as their Agency Head.

We will work tirelessly to carry out our platform, and we will be open and excited to hearing from each and every single Gator. When you take a closer look at the ticket put forward by Change Party, any student will see that these are three people who, quite frankly, have no business holding these offices.

Former Senator Naidu, I have one question for you-- what have you ever actually accomplished for students? You served in the Senate for over a year, and I cannot think of a single tangible change you made. For someone who led the Change Party, you seem awfully content to let others make the change for you.

Former Senator Marcelino, it's awfully funny that you want to run the cabinet, considering that the last time you were involved in student government, you and your party spent five months withholding the nominations of the branch that you are now running to lead.

My running mate, Jade Gonzalez, is incredibly qualified to lead cabinet. Not only has she been in cabinet for two years, but she also has experience leading in cabinet as the Leadership and Service Chair.

Party Leader Banach, as the representative of the Change Party, you've done your job well, even bringing the patented Change Party hypocrisy to this debate. In the past year, you failed to follow through on your platform as an engineering senator for student organizations. So why should the students believe that this time will be any different? Johanna will follow through on her promises, just as she did as the Treasurer of the Indian Students Association.

Constantly throughout the debate, Change brought up resolutions they passed and things they've done. But I have a question. Has any non-involved student ever actually heard of these things? Has anyone in this room ever actually heard of these resolutions that you just listed the number out for? I don't think so.

This resolution for RTS that you celebrate as a win that we got it back for students, I need the students to know, they didn't. They played no part. They ran around and celebrated it as a win when they had nothing to do with it.

On February 25 and 26th, when you go to the ballot box, the choice is clear. In just the past year, not only have I passed more than double the bills my opposition combined has, but Vision Party writes bills that have a real impact. Despite their name, Change works harder on making noise than making change. Jade, Johanna, and I are the ticket with the passion and dedication to lead the student body like never before. Bank on experience. Bank on proven results. Bank on Blake. Check the box for Cox. And vote Vision. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

MARNA I'm sorry. Applause is not appropriate at this time. Applause is not appropriate at this time. Thank you very
WESTON: much. I now invite-- pardon me. I now invite a representative of the Watch Party to give their closing statement.

ALFREDO ORTIZ: All right, y'all, I'm going off script, so bear with me. I want to thank everybody who's here today for making the time, taking the effort. And I want to offer a few of my remarks as to what I've seen in this executive debate, because it's been a couple years, around 10, since we had a third party up on here.

And there's a lot of very good points made on both sides. I hate to play that card, the both sides-ism. But the truth of the matter is that, over the last better part of a decade, there has been a crisis in student government. I would have thought that by now we would have learned to work together. And I don't want to say that an effort has not been made, because we've made efforts, but it's just so difficult, when you're only here for four years, for the memory of the things that happened before you came here. You're constantly having to fight against forgetting how it is exactly that you have to work together.

Now, perhaps Vision is right. Perhaps Vision has the most qualified ticket for these executive roles. But that doesn't mean that the debate and the challenge for these positions is for nothing. I think that we can still come up here, make use of the democratic process, like the court instructed us to do, to make demands out of what we expect the next administration to do. And one of those things that we came here to do was demand fair elections.

We have seen how, if you look at the data-- we'll post it up on our story on Instagram, so just in the spirit of transparency, so you can look at it yourself. But we've seen how a part of the map that represented 10% of the student body is gone. And it's a part of the map that has consistently voted against-- I hate to say it, but whatever party is the majority at the time.

Now, in the context of student government elections, then a lot of these networks that are in place, they make use of these institutional advantages that they have that are available to them. And it's precisely because of that that we have to make sure that students that have a different perspective on how it is that political engagement should be approached, they should be able to participate in a map that represents them.

Now, that said, I do hope that, as we move into the future, there is a movement on behalf of both parties and that they use the leverage available to them and their positions to make sure that nothing will happen in terms of the budget and nothing will happen in terms of executive appointments until we can get together and talk about what the proper way to represent students are. Because it's been two years of us having no voice to the point that we had to drag ourselves up here to try to make this point to y'all. So please--

MARNA

Stop, please Thank you. I now invite a representative from the Change Party to give their three-minute closing statement.

WESTON:

MAXIMILIAN

Gators, tonight, you have seen two very, very different visions for student government. On one hand, you have the Vision Party, a party that has failed students at every turn, a party that gerrymandered the fall Senate election to silence your representation in the chamber, a party that ignored rising housing costs and voted to demolish over a third of the on-campus graduate housing supply without a plan for replacement.

BANACH:

They even blocked the mayor of Gainesville from speaking before the students on RTS funding, nearly costing students millions in transportation benefits. To respond to the personal attacks against me and my running mates, Anamika has [INAUDIBLE] thoughtful legislation, oftentimes shut down by Vision Party, for example, the FED Act, which was calling for voting reform and precinct-level data to be released on student government polling locations.

In response to the attack on Joaquin, need I not remind you, Blake, that you were the party leader of Gator Party that delayed the affirmation of the spring 2023 election and prevented a Senate leadership election from occurring. And in response to your levee against me, I would assure you that my work on six-figure projects as an engineering major, as well as being a dual major in economics, makes me more than qualified to serve you all as treasurer.

On the other side, you have Change Party, the party that gets things done. When Vision refused to fight for affordable housing, we stood up. One resolution that I think the whole room has benefited from that supposedly aren't seen by students was our bill to defend RTS bus funding for students, something that has kept up to this day.

When Vision failed to deliver on 24/7 libraries, we attempted to write the legislation and submitted it to transfer the difference between 24/5 and 24/7. And when Vision underfunded student organizations, we fought for that funding to be secured.

The difference is action. Vision sat here today making more promises. But I ask you all, what promises have they kept to today? You've seen a year of executive control and what that's looked like under Vision-- empty events, wasted funds, and a question-- what was the vision in the first place? Vision tells you to check the box for Cox, but when I look down on my ballot, none of my boxes are checked.

Vision has made one thing clear. They don't work for students. They work for themselves. In Blake's mention of doubling student org based funding, indeed, it was Change Party former judiciary chairperson Jonathan Chance Stephens that wrote this legislation, something I posted about during that cycle in question.

Change Party is different. We're here to fight for every student, undergraduate, graduate, on campus, off campus, every identity, every voice, every Gator. If you believe in real representation, accessible health resources, better transportation, and a student government that actually votes and listens to you, the student, there's only one choice on the ballot this February.

Making change isn't just about a vision, it's about doing the work to make it happen. So I urge you all to vote Change Party on February 25 and 26th, and let's put the student back in student government.

MARNA

Gators, here and everywhere, now is the time.

WESTON:

[APPLAUSE]

I call that a standing ovation for all candidates.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you all. The event now ends. You have a tough choice to make. Lexi, your team, and your faculty advisors, thank you for putting together a great event. Thank you for giving us an opportunity to see, through a clear lens, the opportunity for leadership that awaits the University of Florida. Gators everywhere, you will make the choice. The power now returns to you.

Remember, the welfare of the state rests on the character of its citizens. Thanks, everyone, for attending. We encourage you to vote on February 25 and 26th. Good night. And as always, go Gators.

[CHATTER]