



Three things to watch in the Democratic Primary debates

On June 26 and 27, Democratic candidates for president will take the stage in Miami for the first round of primary debates. Here's what to watch for in the upcoming debates:

#1 Refugees

The world is currently experiencing an unprecedented refugee crisis, with 70 million forcibly displaced people globally and 37,000 new displacements every day. In 2018, the number of displaced people increased by 2.3 million, driven by conflicts in Syria and South Sudan, persecution against the Rohingyas in Myanmar, and a deepening socio-economic and political crisis in Venezuela. While the U.S. has historically been a global leader in refugee assistance, the Trump administration has turned its back on refugees. We've seen the administration make drastic cuts to the refugee resettlement program, turn away asylum seekers at the border, and pull away from the strategic humanitarian aid investments that help keep people safe in their homes.

Recently, Senator Markey (D-MA), introduced the GRACE Act, a bill that would set the annual refugee admissions floor at 95,000 refugees (the average refugee admissions goal of the past four decades). So far, Senators Booker, Harris, Klobuchar, and Sanders have co-sponsored this bill. The IRC hopes to see all candidates endorse this proposed legislation.

What to watch:

- Will candidates take a stand in support of America's legacy of welcome?
- Will candidates prioritize the refugee resettlement program?
- Will candidates promise to restore admissions to historic levels?

#2 Asylum seekers and the border

A growing number of families have been coming to the border fleeing violence and persecution in Central America. They have been met with a series of policies designed to put obstacles in their path to safety. For example, under the so-called "Zero Tolerance" policy, the administration has pursued the systematic separation of children from their parents at the border. In addition, the "Remain in Mexico" policy (also known as the Migrant Protection Protocols, or MPP), has forced thousands of women, children, and families back to Mexico, in unsafe conditions, to wait for the day when they will get the chance to seek protection. We routinely hear that asylum seekers returned under the MPP often lack a safe place to stay while they wait for a hearing scheduled months or years in the future. Many have already been subjected to violence and exploitation in the interim. Representative Veronica Escobar has introduced a bill that would defund MPP ensuring asylum seekers won't be forced to wait in Mexico until their claim for asylum is adjudicated.

What to watch:

- Will candidates propose policies to support and protect women, children, and families seeking safety at the border?
- Will candidates lift up the stories of those who have come to the U.S. in search of safety?
- Will candidates oppose the Migration Protection Protocols? Will candidates support amending the law to eliminate this provision?

#3 Yemen

The conflict in Yemen is driving the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, with famine conditions and the largest suspected cholera outbreak in modern history. Over 24 million people (80% of the population) require humanitarian assistance to survive. According to UNICEF, a Yemeni child dies every ten minutes from entirely preventable war-related causes.

Last year, an unprecedented Senate vote to halt military support to the war in Yemen increased the pressure on the warring parties and pushed them toward a ceasefire agreement. Since then, a fragile political process is ongoing and a localized ceasefire remains in place, but continued diplomatic focus pressure is required to sustain it.

The U.S. has the unique capacity to be a force for de-escalation of the conflict, and a halt to a failed war strategy. But rather than double down on diplomacy, the Administration has declared an “emergency” to bypass Congress and resume billions of dollars in arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, parties to this brutal and often lawless conflict. These sales would add fuel to the fire of the war and consequent humanitarian crisis in Yemen and would entrench the US further as a key backer of the war.

The IRC is on the ground providing lifesaving assistance – health care, nutrition, water and sanitation programming as well as cash support to help them access food and other essentials for their families. But as long as the fighting continues, the people of Yemen will continue to suffer and die.

What to watch:

- Will candidates support a unilateral, unconditional ban on arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates?
- Will candidates discuss the diplomatic initiatives that they would put in place to drive forward a viable political process to end the war in Yemen?
- Will the candidates discuss policies that they would put in place to ensure those who violate international law, regardless of which side of the conflict they are on, are investigated and accountable?