

Male Speaker 1: Michael Brice-Saddler

Female Speaker 1: Cecily Montgomery

Male Speaker 2: Bruce Spiva

Male Speaker 3: Brian Schwalb

Male Speaker 4: Ryan Jones

[O/V]: Overlapping Voices

[U/A]: Unintelligible audio

[START RECORDING DC Attorney General Primary Debate Hosted by the Office of Campaign Finance]

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Good evening and welcome to the second of three debates hosted by the DC office of Campaign Finance. I'm Michael Brice-Saddler and I'm a DC politics reporter for The Washington post. I'll be serving as the moderator for tonight's debate. Tonight, we'll hear from three candidates competing for the office of DC Attorney General. We encourage members of the public to submit questions via the website dcdebates.com and to participate online

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Michael Brice-Saddler: using the hashtag [U/A]. Before we get started, let's hear from the director of the Office of Campaign Finance, Cecily Montgomery.

Cecily Montgomery: Good evening. Welcome to the 2022 DC debates. I am Cecily Montgomery, the director of the Office of Campaign Finance. The 2022 DC debates are the second slate of debates under the fair elections program. Started in 2018,

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Cecily Montgomery: the FEP is a voluntary public financing program operated by the Office of Campaign Finance to support candidates for local political office in the District of

Columbia. All FEP candidates and city-wide contested races in the June 21st, 2022, primary election are required to take part in the debates. Candidates in the traditional campaign finance program are also invited to

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Cecily Montgomery: participate in the debates. It is our hope that these debates will help the public to learn more about the candidates, their positions and policy platforms. We want to take a moment to thank our partner organization and the candidates for participating in this process. Thank you for joining us in our mission to help inform DC voters about the candidates and the citywide contest and their positions.

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Cecily Montgomery: To learn more about the Office of Campaign Finance or the 2022 DC debate, please visit dcdebates.com. The debates will remain on the website through primary day, Tuesday, June 21st, 2022, for those who could not watch or listen live this evening. Again, thank you for your support and with that, let's meet our candidates.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Candidates tonight are running to become the attorney general of the District of Columbia. The attorney general for the District of Columbia is DC's chief legal officer. The DC charter gives the attorney general responsibility for charge and conduct of all the districts law business. The charter also states that the attorney general is responsible for upholding the public interest. The Office of the Attorney General or OAG enforces the laws of the district, provides legal advice to the

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Michael Brice-Saddler: districts, government agencies, and promotes the interests of DC residents.

The OAG has approximately 275 attorneys and 300 other professional staff members. The candidates for tonight's attorney general debate are Ryan Jones, who is a practicing litigator, who started his own law firm. Brian Schwalb, partner in-charge of Venable Law Firm, DC office and Bruce Spiva, a former managing partner at the

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Perkins Coie Law Firm. Here are the ground rules for tonight's debate.

Candidates will have one minute for an opening statement, one minute for a direct answer to a question, and 30 seconds for rebuttal. Each candidate will then have one minute for closing statements. If candidates wish to respond to an opponent's answer, raise your hand, and we'll be sure to call on you as time permits and with that, we'll move to opening statements, starting with Ryan Jones.

Ryan Jones: Good evening.

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Ryan Jones: I'm Ryan Jones. I'm a native Washingtonian that is running to give back to the city that has given me so much using my tested experience. We are in critical and crucial times that require new solutions to cure old problems and your participation today matters as you will be making an important decision by June 21st, that is necessary to create the uplift we so desperately need. The role of this government will be essential to creating real problems to uplift people. However, our government is in need of a course correction in order to meet people where they are and have everyone enjoy a brighter future.

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Ryan Jones: We can use the powerful function of the law to do that and empower us. 2020 revealed and exacerbated inequities and disparities that will require intense focus to repair. We are experiencing spikes in crime, violent crime, economic hardship, a housing crisis, the unrelenting deplorable acts of domestic terrorists, and deserved outrage over our failure to protect women's rights. Elections matter and the values of the people we send into office becomes just as important as their experience and this election will be one that

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Ryan Jones: will have a significant impact on the function of our city and the lives of our residents, not just today with years to come. I started law firm [O/V].

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you Mr. Jones. Next we'll move to Brian Schwalb for your opening statement, you have one minute.

Brian Schwalb: Thank you. And it's good to see everybody this evening. I'm glad to be here and I'm looking forward to talking about the election for our attorney general and how important this role is, but I feel like I need to give voice to something I'm feeling and that I know in talking with a lot of voters, others are feeling too.

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Brian Schwalb: It's been a hard, tough, exhausting time. We're trying to emerge from a pandemic and we're experiencing an inflated economy where it's becoming more and more expensive to live in a city that's already expensive. We're seeing shortages in supplies and goods, and now baby formula being hard to find for young families. We are, you know, seeing Supreme Court about to reverse 50 years of established constitutional law that has become part of our fabric,

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Brian Schwalb: our constitutional fabric and protecting not only a right to choose to have an abortion for women, but who we might love or be intimate with or who we can marry and then we have Buffalo this Saturday, another mass shooting fueled by hate, too much access to guns and it's exhausting and it can be dispiriting, but I want to encourage all of us to engage, to remain optimistic, to not give in to cynicism and to engage in our local politics and this is so important for us and I look forward to talking about the issues that the

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Brian Schwalb: AG'S office has that can make our lives better and safer with everybody this evening.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Schwalb and Mr. Spiva, your opening statement, one minute.

Bruce Spiva: Thank you. Good to be with you. My name is Bruce Spiva. I have spent the last nearly 30 years fighting for everyday people as a civil rights lawyer. I've taken on tough fights and delivered for the folks I represented. I took on slumlords and the district government itself to fight housing discrimination against black, Latino,

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Bruce Spiva: and Asian residents of Columbia Heights who had been pushed out of their homes. They spent the night on city buses with their children, looking for a place to stay. As a result of that lawsuit, the district had to pay thousands of dollars to those residents. I took on the MPD on behalf of a Howard University freshmen, a sexual assault victim, whose case was badly mishandled by the police. Her mother, in a moment that I remember to this day, reminded me that when we feel powerless,

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Bruce Spiva: sometimes just knowing there's someone in your corner makes all the difference. As a result of our case, the council passed the Sexual Assault Victims Rights act of 2014, which added critical protections for sexual assault survivors. I am running for attorney general -

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Spiva.

Bruce Spiva: - because I want to be your lawyer. Thank you.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And let's jump right into. I'll ask all three of you to answer this one. There are several local offices

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Michael Brice-Saddler: on the ballot for DC primaries, including the mayor and various council seats. As a reporter even I can admit it's overwhelming at times to keep track of all the races and what different candidates stand for. So my question to you all is this, why should DC voters be paying attention to this race? And why does it matter who their next elected attorney general is? We'll start with Bruce Spiva, you have one minute.

Bruce Spiva: Thank you. I understand the feeling of being overwhelmed.

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Bruce Spiva: This is my first time as a candidate, my first time running for anything and I certainly have had those feelings in the past going over the many offices that we have to vote for. This is critically important office. It advances the public interest among a broad area of concern to district residents, particularly our lower income residents. Issues such as consumer protection, antitrust enforcement

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Bruce Spiva: civil rights, and child support. The office has 700 professionals and 11 divisions that cover areas like environmental justice and other things that are critical to our lives. So I encourage everyone to learn about the candidates and make your choice. I submit myself after 30 years of experience advancing the very issues that are most pertinent to this office, that I am the best prepared to advance the public interest mission of the office.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you for that response. And Mr. Schwalb, I'll go to you now with the same question. Why should DC voters be paying attention to this race?

Brian Schwalb: Well, all of us in aspiring to be the next attorney general follow on the heels of our first independently elected attorney general [U/A]. It was very significant for our democracy here in DC to have the right to vote for an attorney general. As many of you know, it was previously an appointed position from the mayor.

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Brian Schwalb: Having an independent elected attorney general is critical to our steps towards becoming a state to having a first rate law office that does the hard legal work to make our government work, to protect vulnerable people who are too often being taken advantage of, to fight for people and of course, to be our chief juvenile justice prosecutor, the amount of the work is critical. The work every day requires years of experience and judgment. I bring that 30 years of practicing law, first at the justice department, and then in private practice in a leadership role

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Brian Schwalb: in my firm and I think that's why that experience, that leadership experience is why our current attorney general Karl Racine has endorsed me to be the next attorney

general as has the prior attorney general Irv Nathan, and most recently The Washington Post. It's experienced leadership [O/V]

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you.

Brian Schwalbl: is critical.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you and then we'll go to Ryan Jones with the same question.

Ryan Jones: Thank you. This is an important role that everyone needs to be paying attention to because when you're choosing your chief legal officer

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Ryan Jones: of the District of Columbia, you're using that enforcement arm, you're looking at someone who's guiding the government. You're putting someone in place that will have oversight of what the mayor is doing, what the council is doing and you need to put someone in place that has the moral compass to guide the district in the best direction. This is not simply another position that people can just take on lightly. Technical skills are important. I've been in and out of these courtrooms honing skills

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Ryan Jones: and I recognize where the fires reside. I know that people need access to justice in courtrooms or the place where we can get that done and you need a legal mind that is sharp, that has a vision for the future, to make changes not for right now, but for years to come and going into the courts and taking on important battles on behalf of our residents is critical and you want to send somebody that has the gravitas, that's been doing the work, all scales of work into that office.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Jones.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Next question, DC is unique in that it does not have full control over its own criminal justice system, because it is not a state, for example, under the current system, while the DC Attorney General's office prosecute juvenile offenses and adult misdemeanors, a federal entity, the US attorney's office for DC, prosecutes most adult crimes. If DC were to achieve statehood, what would your approach be to expanding the officer's duties and

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Michael Brice-Saddler: would you use any other state AGS office as a model and we'll start with Brian Schwalb.

Brian Schwalb: Well, thank you. It is absolutely critical to almost everything that we do in our city, that we continue to try to strive towards becoming a state. I think that it is one critical piece of that is having complete control over our criminal justice system, as you're exactly right, a bifurcated system means that I'm so much of what we try to aspire in making our city safer for all

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Brian Schwalb: neighborhoods and everybody. We have a bifurcated system that requires coordination with the federally appointed prosecutor. Sometimes a more favorably appointed federally prosecutor and sometimes the less hospitable, but always somebody who is not responsive to the people who live in the district and vote. I think one of the most significant decisions a prosecutor might have to make is whether a young person, a 16 or 17-year-old who commits a violent crime should be charged as an adult or remain in the juvenile justice system. That is a life altering decision

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Brian Schwalb: and one as chief prosecutor, I don't relish having to make, but I do think it's a decision that should be made by someone responsive to the community and it should be our elected AG that makes that decision.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Schwalb and I'll move to Ryan Jones with the same question. Would you use any other state AG's office as a model if DC where to achieve statehood and what would your approach be for expanding the offices duties?

Ryan Jones: Yes. We have two great states around us, Maryland, and Virginia.

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Ryan Jones: We can use them as a model for how they've set up in a range, their office to have execution of their principles, as well as New York State. We look at the federal system and we recognize that when federal laws are violated, that it's always going to fall into the hands of federal prosecutors. We recognize that DC superior court is a federal one, achieving an article one court, which has that federal jurisdiction, but we practice there. Our lawyers practice there and we have

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Ryan Jones: great attorneys here. And I think what we need to do to expand the office in its power is just recruit wonderful talent and I think we have a city full of wonderful attorneys and we need to have people in place in that office that recognize the ties to the District of Columbia and the needs of the people the most.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thanks, Mr. Jones. And I'll go to Mr. Spiva with the same question. How would you expand the offices duties and would you use any other state AG's office as a model for that?

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Bruce Spiva: Yes. I mean, I think the lack of control over our full local criminal docket is one of the things that shows the imperative of statehood for the District of Columbia and this is an issue that I've been fighting for decades, I was actually arrested in an act of civil disobedience fighting for statehood many years ago. I have marched through the streets; I've worked in court to try

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Bruce Spiva: to get greater local autonomy over things like our budget and I've testified in Congress. It's so imperative. It's also imperative that we get control over our adult felonies, because you can't fully reform a system and you can't control the system that you don't control and so that is so necessary and I think we should be a model, although always you want to look for best practices across the country. There are many excellent AG's offices. We are and are

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Bruce Spiva: becoming and can be even better still a model for other AG's offices and so, I would seek to do that, but always look to learn from other AG's offices as well.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. The next question is for everyone again. The OAG has 10 offices and divisions, ranging from child support services to public advocacy. What division or OAG function in your opinion is most underutilized or right for improvement

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Michael Brice-Saddler: and what's your plan to enhance it? We'll start with Ryan Jones on this one.

Ryan Jones: Thank you. Discussions with my team and looking around the United States I think we need to be looking at cybercrime and I think we need to have a department dedicated

to the new forms of fraud, way people are being taken advantage of digitally and preparing our city to be protected against international and other types of actors that don't have borders and we need to

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Ryan Jones: put in place people who are experts in that field and I look to that. I also look around the other parts of the office and I focus on expanding public advocacy and I would do that by incorporating angel fund litigation in order to take on critical cases that we can win and reign in money so we can continue to have control over our budget without having to be compromised in any way and entrenched our independence.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Fascinating. Thank you. And then, Bruce Spiva, same question for you. Is there an OAG division or function that you look at as perhaps being underutilized or right for improvement?

Bruce Spiva: Yes, I don't want to pick on any one division or function because they're all important, but certainly one thing that I have a discussion of on my website that I think we can improve

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Bruce Spiva: and that is a critical function. Is the child support function, getting in place, appropriate child support orders. There is also authority to help the non-custodial parent meet their child support obligations by helping them with things like job counseling and the like, and so I think that's a critically important program. It is an anti-poverty

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Bruce Spiva: program and so that's something that I would put a lot of focus and priority on, but there are many others that are also important and certainly through my years of public service fighting for environmental justice, fighting for consumer protection, antitrust enforcement and the like, I'm well-prepared to provide guidance and to further the public interest in those areas as well.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And Brian Schwalb, is there any division or OAG function that you look at

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Michael Brice-Saddler: as right for improvement or that could be expanded or is underutilized.

Brian Schwalb: I think that the most important thing for any leader to do is to listen, to come in and to really spend the time actively listening with the division heads and the great talented lawyers and professionals in the office to hear directly from them, to think about ways in which the office can become more effective and efficient. I do think there's some things that I would like to see the office do. One is a

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Brian Schwalb: more reinvigorated community engagement arm, where the AG's office is actually physically out in the community listening, being present, sharing information, sharing trends, and hearing also from the community directly. I think that there could be an enhanced focus in the office on traffic and traffic violence, being a convener with respect to some of the enforcement tools that the AG has with respect to speeding and reckless driving and drunk driving in our city. I'd also like to see

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Brian Schwalb: the office have a renewed focus on entrepreneurial and small businesses, discriminatory barriers to entry in terms of building wealth through business ownership.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And the next question I have is for Mr. Spiva. I would be remiss if I did not bring up one of the more dramatic moments in this election cycle. You challenged the qualifications of AG candidate, Kenyan McDuffie, which the DC Board of Elections upheld causing him to be removed from the ballot.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: The DC Court of Appeals further upheld the Board of Elections ruling. Kenyan McDuffie has suspended his campaign. Since then, my colleagues and I have heard from DC voters who were upset by the fact you brought the challenge. My question is as follows: What would you say to those voters to get them to change their minds about you and what do you say to those who feel like they lost out on a chance to decide who was the most qualified with their vote? One minute.

Bruce Spiva: Well first, let me say that

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Bruce Spiva: I brought the challenge because I thought that although a very dedicated public servant and a good person that the council member didn't meet the legal qualifications for the office and the court and the Board of Elections agreed with me, but I'm looking forward now to making my case for why I am the most experienced and best prepared to carry on the public function of the office and I'm reaching out to council member

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Bruce Spiva: McDuffie's supporters. I understand that feeling of frustration. I've lost cases before in my career and I've had personal disappointment. So I definitely understand that and

there's certainly no sense of celebration in my mind or in what I'm saying about that, as I said the council member I think has been a good public servant, but I'm now looking forward to the rest of the race

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Bruce Spiva: and sometimes as attorney general you have to make tough decisions and you have to take a stand before they are decided. Taking a stand after the decision has been made is not leadership and I hope that they can appreciate that I decided this was an instance where I had to make a tough call and I followed through on my principles. Thank you.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you and Brian Schwalb, I'm going to go to you on the same topic, after the

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Michael Brice-Saddler: DC Court of Appeal's decision that kept Kenyan McDuffie off the ballot, you put out a statement asserting that your campaign had "no part" in trying to prevent him from being on the ballot and that you had hoped to run against him. So I was hoping to get some clarity on that. Were you supportive of the challenge when Mr. Spiva filed it or were you against it and why?

Brian Schwalb: I was not supportive of it. I was aware of the argument, the legal argument that could be made and in fact the legal argument that was ultimately accepted.

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Brian Schwalb: And I recognize that that is now the established rule, but I do think one of the things about being the attorney general is recognizing that you have to exercise judgment about when certain arguments are raised, even arguments that can be won, because there are collateral impacts associated with the exercise of judgment in making arguments. We

don't necessarily want or need an attorney general that makes every argument just because he or she thinks it's a winner.

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Brian Schwalb: I think we need somebody who exercises judgment and that's what I did in the campaign in terms of recognizing that while there may have been a tactical advantage to raising an argument, I exercised my judgment not to make it. I got into this race thinking primarily I needed to make my case as a first-time candidate to the voters, to explain to the voters why I thought what I brought to this race in terms of experience and qualification and independence and leadership made me the most qualified candidate.

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Brian Schwalb: And I was prepared to make that case to the voters and I still am.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. Ms. Spiva, would you like to respond to Mr. Schwalb?

Bruce Spiva: Just briefly. You know the time to make that argument would be before the Board of Elections and the Court of Appeals had made its decision to wait until the argument was over and then to make that statement, you know

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Bruce Spiva: and Mr. Schwalb is my friend, but again, that's not leadership. So I don't think it's divisive though, to raise an issue of qualifications that the council put in place and that the people passed for a reason. Again taking nothing away from a council member McDuffie, I think he's a very good person and I think he's done a lot of good things on the council, but I believed, raised in good faith, and it was confirmed that these

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Bruce Spiva: legal qualifications were not met.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Schwalb, 30 seconds of rebuttal, if you want it. He said that your statement after the fact was not leadership.

Brian Schwalb: Well, I disagree. I was clear in the sense that I wasn't making an argument, a technical argument to the Board of Elections. I was making the arguments of the voters. I was making the point that while the statute has certain minimum qualifications that require

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Brian Schwalb: for the AG that the discussion with the District of Columbia should be, who is maximally qualified to be our attorney general and that a discussion about minimum qualifications was a distraction. So I was taking a position. I wasn't waiting. I just wasn't advocating an argument that Mr. Spiva chose to make.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Ryan Jones, I'd like to get your take on this. Were you supportive of or against the challenge? And what's your message to voters who may now be re-evaluating their choice for attorney general.

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Ryan Jones: As a first time candidate, you step into a race and you want to put your best foot forward and that's what I'm doing. When we go out and we campaign and we try to distinguish ourselves from other candidates, things are said, and you take positions. Being a native Washingtonian and sharing money of the friends and colleagues that support Kenyan McDuffie, I didn't want that to be a part of my legacy and I would take the results as they came. I think what's happened is unfortunate

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Ryan Jones: for Mr. McDuffee, the district, and everyone here. We've had to now highlight an issue that, you know, has made this race very essential and made it very uncomfortable to

talk about. However, we have the individuals here before us and DC voters have a great selection to pick from and I would like them to vote for me.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thanks, Mr. Jones. And we're going

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Michael Brice-Saddler: to move on to the next topic, which is for Brian Schwalb. Excuse me, so actually, I'm going to go to Mr. Jones for this next one. Earlier this month, political published a draft Supreme Court opinion that would overturn the right to abortion established in Roe V. Wade. This past weekend, we saw thousands March in the district in support of abortion rights. What's your plan to protect reproductive rights in the district? You have one minute.

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Ryan Jones: What was decided and what has been leaked has been planned and in the works for many years. So having strong advocates such as myself on the front lines of courtrooms, having people go lobby to legislative bodies that matters. People on the other side of it have been working hard to have Roe v. Wade overturned. We need to be working just as hard with just as much as a concerted effort with legislative bodies around the country,

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Ryan Jones: attorney general around the country, so we can take this fight back to the courts, get back before the Supreme Court and have women's rights protected.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Jones. I'm going to go to Ms. Spiva with that same question. What's your plan to protect reproductive rights?

Bruce Spiva: Am I still live, because you cut out for me. I can't see anybody.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: I can hear you.

Bruce Spiva: Okay. Thank you.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Did you hear the question?

Bruce Spiva: What's my plan to protect reproductive rights in the district?

Michael Brice-Saddler: Yes.

Bruce Spiva: Yeah. And I think again, this is another place that really emphasizes the importance of achieving statehood because this decision, first of all, is awful, if it in fact, comes into play, as it appears it will, but it's especially awful for

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Bruce Spiva: the people of the District of Columbia and particularly the women of the District of Columbia because the Congress does and often has interfered with our own local laws and so if there's ever a unified control of the Congress and the presidency by Republicans, we can be sure that they're going to go after our right to choose laws and so our options are limited, but certainly we should explore any options we would have in the courts

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Bruce Spiva: to try to resist that should that come to pass. We also should try right now while we have democratic control of the Congress and the presidency to try to get protective laws passed to protect the right to choose, not only here in the district, but across the nation, because it will be harder for a unified Republican government to undo that if it's taken care of now. Thank you.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Spiva.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Schwalb, what's your plan to protect reproductive rights in DC?

Brian Schwalb: Well, start with the premise that, you know, women in our country cannot be criminalized for needing or seeking an abortion. That is infuriating. The principal is infuriating and we need to recognize how outrageous the slippery slope we could be on if the leaked opinion is in fact going to be the Supreme Court opinion. I think the Office of the Attorney General needs to be ready to fight

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Brian Schwalb: with every potential fight we have, every tool we have to push back. If I'm attorney general, there's going to be litigation tools that are available, whether those are constitutional arguments, statutory arguments, common law arguments, regulatory arguments. We're going to reach to principles of home rule and administrative procedure act and fundamental rights. I do not accept the proposition that if Congress chooses to be hostile in light of the reasoning of the slip opinion, that it has the right to be hostile, because so much of the rationale

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Brian Schwalb: of the opinion is giving the decision on whether or not abortion will be lawful or illegal back to the people. We're going to be in Alliance with our state AG's across the country fighting, because there's going to be a lot of interjurisdictional or interstate issues. There are privacy issues that are going to be litigated and of course, we're going to need to work with our mayor and city council to make sure our laws here in the city are protective of those who live here and women who come here looking for quality

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you.

Brian Schwalb: available healthcare.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Schwalb and

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Michael Brice-Saddler: just reminder to all the candidates, if you want to way in or respond, you can raise your hand and you'll have 30 seconds for rebuttal. Mr. Spiva, did you want to way in? Yes, 30 seconds.

Bruce Spiva: Yeah and I don't know if it's in the nature of rebuttal, but just an add. I think we need to be creative with the law and fight with the law if this awful circumstance occurs, but I think it also is important to recognize the difficulty of our current

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Bruce Spiva: situation and why it's so imperative and that's why I've been fighting for statehood and greater local autonomy for so long. I think it's incumbent upon every elected official in the district to be doing everything they can to try to get statehood and greater local autonomy, to be able to protect from things like this.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. Now, one of the areas that OAG has long focused on

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Michael Brice-Saddler: is consumer complaints and price gouging. Lately we've seen a baby formula shortage that has been a great source of concern for many parents and families across the nation and in the district. So what's your strategy to defend DC consumers when these types of shortages of essential supplies occur including hoarding and price gouging, Mr. Schwalb, I'm going to start with you on this one.

Brian Schwalb: Yeah. Whenever you have market conditions like we are facing with scarcity and supply chain issues, and you

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Brian Schwalb: have a situation where some people can try to take advantage, it's ever more important for an attorney general to be vigilant and looking to protect the people who live here in the District of Columbia, who shouldn't be forced to pay more for baby formula or gas or masks or medicine, simply because of somebody trying to take advantage of a shortage of supply. Our consumer protection laws are strong in the city. We have rules and laws that need to be enforced effectively and that's what I think I will do in leadership of the Office of Attorney General

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Brian Schwalb: with the talented lawyers in the public advocacy division is aggressively bringing claims under our consumer protection statute that holds people accountable when they seek to profit on people who are in vulnerable positions and you hope to do it aggressively with meaningful sanctions to change behavior and send a message that that type of predatory behavior is not acceptable in our city.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. Mr. Jones, do you have any different view on how you would approach hoarding and price gouging?

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Ryan Jones: Watching that new phenomenon happening, especially through the pandemic, and I think the best strategy will be to work with other enforcement bodies to ensure that no one is hoarding and then trying to resell in the market to make a profit and we have to protect our consumers as we are charged to do as attorney generals. I think litigation is slow. So we have to get out in front of it and take preventative measures from that happen and what does that look like?

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Ryan Jones: We have to be creative in order to do so and I look forward to having the opportunity to do it.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Spiva, where do you stand on this? What would you do to prevent hoarding and price gouging, especially in the situation like we're seeing now with baby formula.

Bruce Spiva: Well, I would go after companies that were guilty of that, of hoarding or price gouging. We have laws against that. We have consumer protection laws

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Bruce Spiva: and we have, you know, anti-price, gouging laws and what I would say again is that, you know, I formed my own firm to do this kind of work, to fight for consumer protection. I've litigated cases under the DC Consumer Protection Procedures Act. I have litigated antitrust cases involving issues of monopoly pricing and of course, price gouging is something entirely another level above that

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Bruce Spiva: where you essentially take advantage of a market dislocation and so I'm well-prepared to take action where we find evidence that's going on.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thanks to all three of you for your thoughtful answers on that question. And now we have a timely submitted question from Dean Lewis, who writes, how will you ensure an environment in the district or racism is not tolerated? What can be done to ensure a situation like the one that happened in Buffalo

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Michael Brice-Saddler: this weekend doesn't happen east of the Anacostia river. Brian Schwalb I'll start with you on this one. What's your response?

Brian Schwalb: We are seeing a rise in hate, in vile hate, white supremacy, homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Asian hate, anti-Semitic hate everywhere. It's fueled by internet fringe groups that were once fringed, are now for

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Brian Schwalb: lots of pernicious reasons becoming more and more mainstream and all of our thought leaders and all of our elected leaders have to stand up and speak out against hate wherever they see it and stand on the side of the right things. There's no two sides of this question or find opinions and find people on both sides. Hate is wrong and we need to continually stand up against that. One of the ways I've been involved in our community is at the US Holocaust Museum and Memorial, which has been engaged

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Brian Schwalb: in aggressive education, pushing out issues about lessons we can learn from the Holocaust, for people who are Holocaust deniers, and making sure that by education and talking about these issues we squelch hate before it leads to the kind of violence we saw in Buffalo and in so many other places, unfortunately.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Schwalb and of course hate crimes [U/A] as well remains an important [U/A]. Mr. Spiva, what would your response be?

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Michael Brice-Saddler: How do we make sure that what happened in Buffalo and what happened in east of Anacostia river, what measures or actions would you take?

Bruce Spiva: Yeah, well, first we need to recognize where this latest epidemic of hate and violence springs from. Of course we have a long history in this country of this kind of racially

motivated violence, including long history of lynching and other crimes against people of color

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Bruce Spiva: and as my friend said people of the Jewish faith and people who LGBTQ plus population, but right now what's so troubling is this is stemming not only from former President Trump, but from the statements of so many in the Republican Party fueling this hate and their enablers on Fox News and so we're up against something, a very serious wave

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Bruce Spiva: of encouragement in essence, with the types of rhetoric, the replacement theory that we're seeing by what used to be a respectable political party and is no longer at this point and so we need to, you know, enforce and strengthen our red flag laws, so when we have somebody who's mentally ill or has shown a propensity to danger as it appears the shooter in Buffalo

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Bruce Spiva: had, that we can get their guns from them. We need to strengthen our gun laws as much as we can within constitutional bounds.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And Ryan Jones, the same question for you, what do we do to ensure what happened in Buffalo doesn't happen in DC?

Ryan Jones: [U/A] look at this situation, you recognize this is historical in nature and it's not a political issue. We have to disband hate where it is. We use the Law

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Ryan Jones: Office of the Attorney General's office to go after these folks where they reside and try to catch them early, try to take on lawsuits that hit them in their pockets, hit them where it hurts, and don't allow them to have the resources to exercise this hate. I think this is a greater issue and I think we need laws to protect African-Americans and they need to be on the books from a federal level and local level. We need to do that with other protected classes of individuals, so that we eradicate the culture of racism and hate in this country

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Ryan Jones: which has been going on far too long, which is a part of the reason why I'm running for attorney general, if not the main reason.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Jones. And now we're going to pause the debate and take a 5-minute break. We'll see you all back at 7:53 p.m.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Welcome back. I want to take a moment to reiterate the ground rules for tonight's debate. Candidates have one minute for answer to a question, 30 seconds for rebuttal. At the end of the debate this evening, each candidate will then have one minute for closing statements. If candidates wish to respond to an opponent's answer, raise your hand and we'll be sure to call on you

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Michael Brice-Saddler: as time permits. We want to thank all of our viewers for submitting questions. Please continue to submit them via the dcdebates.com website or on Twitter using the hashtag #DCdebates2022 or a #DCision22 and let's jump right back in with more questions for our candidates. Attorney General Karl Racine during his tenure has been very vocal about city issues and agencies

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Michael Brice-Saddler: including the city's crime lab, which lost accreditation last year, as well as conditions at the DC jail. As the independent attorney general, how much of a watchdog role should the AG play over city agencies? I'll start with Ryan Jones; you have one minute.

Ryan Jones: That's one of the major functions of the office, you're acting as the top legal mind and you're going to be coordinating with the attorneys in various agencies and making the tough calls on how to interpret laws, how to enact regulations,

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Ryan Jones: how you promulgate regulations and enact laws and that's the critical function of the office. I would be asserting myself along with my team in order to make sure we're putting residents in the best position to get the resources that they need from the agencies and the functions that they serve.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Jones and Mr. Schwalb, I would pitch the same question to you. How much of a watchdog role should the AG be playing over city agencies and how

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Michael Brice-Saddler: would you go about doing that?

Brian Schwalb: So I think that the term watchdog is one we should think a little bit about because the AG by definition has a job of defending and advising and working with the mayor and the agencies. I think effective lawyering is often done through collaboration and communication, working with agencies to make sure they do their job better to figure out why there are mistakes or problems that are repeating and trends and try to solve problems. Good lawyers do that.

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Brian Schwalb: Of course, the AG also has to protect the public interest and that means sometimes when the residents of the District of Columbia are in conflict with the government agencies that are supposed to be serving them, the AG has to step up and speak for the public interest, which is oftentimes ensuring that the agencies do their job and hold them accountable. That's why it's so important to bring in independence and outside view and a problem solving mentality. I hope that there are rare occasions where an AG

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Brian Schwalb: has to step away from representation of an agency. That's a drastic step to take, but there are times when legal ethics may require it. The goal is to make sure our government works and I think number one, the AG has to try his best to do that every day.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And Mr. Spiva, same question for you. What do you view as the watchdog role of the AG Office?

Bruce Spiva: Yeah, I think that AG's north star should always be

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Bruce Spiva: to protect the public interest. Now, we are, the AG is responsible for defending district agencies, but I don't see a conflict there in that in serving that capacity, when the district has done wrong, when it's gone off track, when it's violating the law or the constitution, then the duty is to counsel, even pound the table, if necessary

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Bruce Spiva: to try to get the agency to get back on the right track and I would also like to take the temperature down between the AG's office and the mayor and work more in a sense of collaboration and partnership and walking away from representation truly would be the last resort. I can understand the frustration that might sometime lead someone to want to do that, but there is a cost to that because then you lose your seat at the table and your ability to

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Bruce Spiva: effectively pressure the agency to make things right.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Yeah and why don't we stay on that topic, because the Attorney General Karl Racine in December, he stopped representing the city's Department of Corrections in matters related to federal inspection, into allegations of poor living conditions and treatment in the DC jail.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Was that the right call and as AG what would you do, if anything, about conditions at the DC jail and we'll start with Mr. Schwalb on that one.

Brian Schwalb: Well, I don't know, because I wasn't privy to the conversations or communications whether it was the right call or not. I do have a lot of confidence in AG Racine and the professionals in his office and fully understand the way the rules of ethics work and the obligations of lawyers. There are times under the ethics rules when a client and a lawyer

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Brian Schwalb: can no longer maintain that attorney-client relationship and it is not up to the lawyer to stand up in the public or in the corner of the newspaper and explain why he or she has to withdraw. That itself would be unethical to do. There are privileges and a confidentiality that is critical, but I reiterate what I said earlier. The main goal, the AG can't choose between representing the district government and representing the public interest, because both of those are critical parts of the job description

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Brian Schwalb: under the statute and doing that hard work and bringing the judgment necessary to make decisions in that hard work is essential and that's what I think I bring uniquely to this race, is the ability to exercise judgment in hard times and hard decisions.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And I'm going to stick with you, Mr. Schwalb, to discuss more about conditions at the DC jail. As AG, what would you do, if anything, about the reported conditions at the jail?

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Brian Schwalb: Well, we have a Jails and Justice Task Force that put out a very specific set of 80 recommendations, concrete, specific recommendations, an organization that I've been

involved with for more than 10 years, the Council for Court Excellence was part of facilitating that process. A lot of time and a lot of effort went into navigating the question of how do we make our DC jail more humane, more likely to help people rehabilitate. We've seen such shocking deplorable conditions in that jail for decades

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Brian Schwalb: and one of the real stains on our city was it took the white supremacists from January 6th to be held in that jail and to have their lawyers protest it for it to become another focus point for our city, because too many black citizens in DC have been incarcerated in that jail for years in those same deplorable conditions. So as the chief law officer and fought leader in law and justice, I'm going to advocate aggressively for those concrete steps in the report of the Jails and Justice Task Force to start being implemented.

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Brian Schwalb: They're ready. We now have some money in the budget to do it, and it's time to get on to doing that work and getting to the results that that report lays out.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Spiva, I'm going to go to you with that same question. What would you do as attorney general about conditions at the DC jail?

Bruce Spiva: Yeah, I too would seek to implement the recommendations of the task force. I think ultimately and their ultimate recommendation is that it's going to

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Bruce Spiva: need to be replaced. I think it's a shame that the deplorable conditions only got attention and it's a shame on our government that they only got attention after white supremacists were jailed there and so we need to be making sure that all of our agencies and particularly people at the DC jail

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Bruce Spiva: are being treated constitutionally and that there is not racial inequity even in what we notice about the unconstitutional treatment. I think that's critical. And I think the critical function of the AG is to counsel, put pressure on the client to make it right and that's something that I have a great deal of experience and I've litigated large

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Bruce Spiva: national

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you.

Bruce Spiva: class actions and I've represented large corporations and associations and so, you know, I would be able to be effectively be able to do that.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And Mr. Jones, same question for you, conditions at the DC jail. What do you think needs to be done? What would you do as attorney general?

Ryan Jones: So first I know that there's a decision that it needs to be replaced, and we want to see where we want to replace it and where it should be.

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Ryan Jones: We're talking about putting it right down there in judiciary square, [U/A] into the various courts, so that there's a level of efficiency and with the change of the way we have a workplace, we're not using that area as much and that will be a great opportunity to revitalize that judiciary square area. I think it's odd at best to say that we wouldn't defend the district against the conditions of the jail and that's what your job is to do. I would defend the district and I think it's odd that it took

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Ryan Jones: white supremacy to step to the point and create concern about the conditions when it's been in a deplorable state for a very long time. So it's upon us to take these real issues and handle them with square on and not worry about who is bringing the complaint and create fairness in the law and how we execute it in these important positions.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thanks Mr. Jones. And I want to make sure we spend some time talking about crime.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Over the last year, there's been a significant uptick in carjacking, committed by youth. AG Racine has said he has prosecuted the majority of these cases and offered rehabilitation services to the youth involved, but some argue that approach is not working given the high volume of carjacking and the fact that a subset of those incidents are committed by repeat juvenile offenders. What would you do differently as the attorney general to address youth carjacking? And I'll start with Mr. Spiva.

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Bruce Spiva: Well, I think it's a very serious problem and certainly I would prosecute juveniles that committed violent carjackings. I mean, there's a very big difference, I think, between putting a gun to somebody's head in a carjacking and I don't know if you can actually hot wire a car now with the technology, but you had been hot wiring a car, obviously, but with our children

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Bruce Spiva: and we're talking about juveniles here, always I think paramount in our minds is we are trying to rehabilitate, trying to get them back on the right track. So there must be accountability, but at the same time, we need to be providing these use with the services so

that they don't get into trouble again, they don't commit another carjacking and so that would be my approach.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Jones, the floor is yours for that question.

Ryan Jones: We're looking at crimes of despair.

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Ryan Jones: [U/A] we have to be aware that we need to put checks and balances on our citizens making sure that they don't repeat. Does that mean we're getting the quicker to probation, tracking devices, are we hiring police that are from Washington DC that can park their cars on streets to try to deter the bad acts from happening in the first place? Because prevention is essential to what it is that I want to do as attorney general. I recognize that this is a very difficult question, it's hard to resolve in one minute

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Ryan Jones: but we have to hold folks accountable, but in doing it in a way that it doesn't put young folks on the margins of society while giving them a real chance to succeed in this world after making a mistake.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. Mr. Schwalb, what would you do differently as attorney general to address youth carjacking?

Brian Schwalb: Well, I want to be an AG that always remembers when we're talking about juvenile justice, we're talking about kids, we're talking about young people

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Brian Schwalb: whose brains are developing. We have an arbitrary line in our system at 18. We know from science that brains are developing until kids are 24-25. We also have to recognize that we can't arrest and prosecute our way out of some of the difficult crime

problems we have. I do believe that violent repeat offenders need to be held accountable when they're kids and we need to make sure that when we are holding them accountable, we're giving resources to absolutely help them with mental health and trauma and job training

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Brian Schwalb: and finding a way to become hopeful again. But we also have to be careful about the political nature of talking about juvenile crime. The stats don't bear out the notion that we've had an uptick in juvenile crime. In fact, last year of all arrests made only 7% were of kids and the notion that kids are doing repeat carjackings is a little bit misleading when in fact oftentimes these cases, whether they're by adults or kids, are very hard to prosecute at the US attorney's office or at the AG's office

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Brian Schwalb: given the nature of the evidence and we should talk more about this because sometimes politics telescopes down an issue that's much more complex and it gets politicized and they know who gets hurt in that, the kids. And that's something that as AG I'm going to really stand up and against, even if it's unpopular.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Schwalb and I'm wanting to get to a submitted question from Jacqueline Lebain. She asks the current AG Racine asked the judge to dismiss a lawsuit filed

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Michael Brice-Saddler: by a DC public offender allegedly accusing DC government and Police Department of keeping a watch list of reporters and organizers who often criticized DC government. Would you support such a watch list and how do you as AG expect to listen

to those who criticize your office and work with them to create real solutions? And I'll go to Ryan Jones.

Ryan Jones: Well, I'm unaware of this. However, just listening to it for the first time, I imagine

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Ryan Jones: you want your residents to hold you accountable and this is a way to do it and as opposed to dismissing such an action, you step to the plate and try to resolve it in a diplomatic way and be willing to help yourself out there for the people to see so that they can entrust or put trust in the person that they put in position in the first place. So I would not dismiss such a claim. I would want to lean into it and make sure that they are getting the results and the answers

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Ryan Jones: that is the goal of the watch list in the first place.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And Mr. Spiva I'll let you take that one as well. Would you support such a watch list and how as an AG would you listen to those who criticize your office and work with them towards solutions?

Bruce Spiva: Well, I certainly wouldn't support the creation of a watch list of reporters. I think that's antithetical to our notion of civil liberties and

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Bruce Spiva: transparent government and the right to know of the citizens. Sometimes as a defender of the district, you might have to move for dismissal of such a suit and I did read about this in the newspapers. I don't know any more details about it than that, but this seems to me an instance where you would sure want to be counseling your client that this is unlawful,

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Bruce Spiva: likely unlawful, and obviously I'd have to look at the particular circumstances of this particular case. So, I'm not opining on this particular case, but the general notion of a watch list to try to intimidate reporters is pretty antithetical to the first amendment and citizens' rights to know, and certainly if it's my office doing that I would say that it would have to be stopped.

Michael Brice-Saddler: And Mr. Schwalb, your commentary on AG Racine moving

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Michael Brice-Saddler: to dismiss that lawsuit or trying to have that lawsuit dismissed and what do you say in response to Jacqueline's question about how you would support or work with people who criticize the office.

Brian Schwalb: So I hope everybody can understand that, you know, commenting on a pending case that I would take over responsibility for managing, if I'm fortunate enough to be elected, wouldn't be appropriate. So I'm not going to talk about the specifics of the case. I am aware of it from reading about it in the newspaper.

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Brian Schwalb: I think that what that lawsuit is a reflection of is the FOI Act, the Freedom of Information Act, which is a big piece of litigation that any governmental agency, federal government, and our city government is part of. Lawsuits are brought and the law needs to be complied with. There are exemptions to providing information under the Freedom of Information Act, but the presumption is one of transparency. As a leader of the Attorney General's office. My presumption is going to be in transparency. I want to have a transparent culture

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Brian Schwalb: in the Attorney General's Office. I want to be transparent with the people who live in the District of Columbia subject to the hard legal work that the office has to do, oftentimes, which is required to be kept confidential. Our juvenile justice system has confidentiality protections in it for the protection of young people, but transparency tends to be a good thing in terms of making sure government works and at the end of the day, all of us deserve a government that works.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And I'm going to stick with public safety.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: It's a major concern for DC residents, but as we discussed earlier, the DC OAG's office has a limited ability to prosecute adults that commit crimes. So other than fighting for statehood and more control over DC's justice system, what can the OAG's office really do to stem rising crime? And how would you accomplish that? I'm going to go with Ryan Jones first.

Ryan Jones: Thank you. So looking at violent crimes, looking at the issues we have with guns, I've put forth wanting

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Ryan Jones: to encourage the mayor to implement a gun buyback program to get guns off our street, to take away the instrumentality, which people are committing these crimes. We want to have a police presence. If we do, let's put police on bikes, let's put them more accessible and making sure that folks feel that the police presence is creating the deterrence for crime to occur in the first place. That ramping up of presence, I agree with there being a deterrent effect to it. Also using the courts.

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Ryan Jones: That's what we do. We want to make sure that we're holding people accountable in a real way to create not only specific deterrents for that person to engage in criminal activity, but to let people know generally that you should not engage in criminal acts as a general deterrence so that we know that we're creating the safety that we desire with the powers that [U/A].

Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Schwalb's, with the OAG's limited ability to prosecute adults that commit crimes, what can the OAG's office do to stem the

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Michael Brice-Saddler: crime surge that we're seeing right now and how would you accomplish that if you are elected?

Brian Schwalb: Well, I've put out a 6-point action plan to make neighborhoods safer and reduce crime, addressing both current crime and more importantly addressing the root causes of crime. What the AG can do is try to most aggressively with respect to adult crime, get at the underlying roots of why crime happens. So much of that happens from lack of economic equality. We don't share

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Brian Schwalb: the resources and abundance of our city and the opportunity that those resources create fairly and equitably across the city and there's many implications of an effective civil enforcement of our laws to try to narrow that equity gap that starts to bring down some of the conditions that lead to hopelessness, that lead to despair, and that too often lead to criminal behavior. I think we can bring civil actions to try to keep guns out of our city and attack internet providers that are selling gun products, but the fact of the matter

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Brian Schwalb: is we can't arrest and prosecutor or sue our way out of the gun problem in our city.

There are too many guns. So we need to try to keep people away from guns and address the conditions that lead people to using guns, to resolve their disagreements.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Spiva, how do we address rising crime with the OAG's limited ability to prosecute adults? What's your solution?

Bruce Spiva: Yeah, I think, first of all I understand the fear and particularly it's not so much a rising crime problem,

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Bruce Spiva: but in some of our areas and this disproportionately impacts areas east of the river, our communities are understandably under fear from what has been a consistent level of violence and so we need to A, make sure we're holding people accountable; B, we do need to address the root causes particularly, and I wouldn't minimize the impact of

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Bruce Spiva: doing the right thing when it comes to our children, although I have said that, I believe we need to jurisdiction over adult felonies, it's still a major area, juvenile justice and so we need to be providing the types of mental health counseling and substance abuse counseling, appropriate education, including vocational education as appropriate, to try to keep our kids out of the trouble in the first place and if they get into trouble

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Bruce Spiva: ultimately to be able to get them back on the right track.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And speaking of children, as part of the council's budget process last week they voted in favor of phasing police out of the city's public schools.

Some principals have said their staff feel unsafe and they wanted police in schools, while students have said police made them feel unsafe or at least some students have testified as such. Where do you stand on this issue? Do police belong in DC school?

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Michael Brice-Saddler: And I'm going to start with Mr. Spiva.

Bruce Spiva: Yeah, I think this is not an area where one size fits all. I mean, obviously the goal, I think ultimately is that none of our schools need police in the school, because if we're doing what we need to be doing for our communities, all of our communities, there won't be that threat, but there are some communities and I've talked to people I've, you know, particularly some of our brothers and sisters

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Bruce Spiva: east of the river who actually do feel the need to still have police officers in the schools. And so I would look at this on an individual basis, what does the actual community and the school want? And if they do feel the need for resource officers in the schools, we need to make sure those resource officers are properly trained so that they're not perhaps inadvertently traumatizing kids by their very presence there, but are protective presence.

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Bruce Spiva: Secondly, we need to make sure we're also providing the school nurses and social workers and psychologists, because right now we have many more times the number of police per children particularly in our black and brown areas than we have school nurses and psychologists, etc. per children.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Spiva. Mr. Schwalb, do police belong in DC schools?

Brian Schwalb: We all have to recognize how hard it is to be a student today.

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Brian Schwalb: Coming out of the pandemic in particular, in the best of circumstances, kids have had a hard time learning and remaining engaged, even when they have good internet and quiet spaces to learn and supportive parents. For so many young people, the pandemic has pushed them further behind in school or worse, has pushed them out of school, and that creates a lot of risk. Kids can't learn when they're afraid. Kids can't learn when they're traumatized and kids across the city

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Brian Schwalb: are suffering as a result of the pandemic. You know, the city council's decision to bring back the number and ultimately reduce to 0 in 5 years, the police presence in schools is a decision of the community and the AG has to recognize that through our council, the community has spoken and my hope is that we think about police as being part of the solution and we give police resources to co-partner when crises are happening and we don't ask police to be places

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Brian Schwalb: where they're not uniquely trained and capable to be and maybe we get to the place where schools are another place where like domestic violence and substance abuse and emotional crises, police can be trained to be in a supportive partnering role.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. Mr. Jones, what's your take? Do police belong in DC schools?

Ryan Jones: We're looking at balancing interests here. We have to stem down and stand up for young people to make them feel safe.

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Ryan Jones: Because that look like having safe passage, individuals there, does that mean you're changing some rules, regulations about people coming in and out of school, so they're not using guns. Having resource officers or police officers present seems to provide some sort of sense of safety for some and we have to balance that. What we have to do is listen to our community. We don't have the answers. And as AG, I want to listen to what the community feels and we've heard one size does not fit all.

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Ryan Jones: So what does one individual school need are on balance with another institution or another school across town? And we need to provide people what they need for their current positions or conditions, so that we're responding effectively to what's necessary and not creating a situation where everyone's just getting a reactionary service and putting people in places where they need to be effectively out front.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. Sticking with crime here.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: There's been so much talk about DC's various programs to prevent violence without involving police, including the Cure the Streets Program out of the Office of Attorney General, but even with millions of dollars spent annually on these interruption and prevention programs, violent crime continues to be a significant issue in the district. So how does Cure the Streets specifically need to be improved upon and how would you do it? We're going to go with Mr. Schwalb.

Brian Schwalb: Remember

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Brian Schwalb: Cure the Streets and violence interruption is part of a holistic approach to addressing crime. The idea is that if we can interrupt cycles of violence and rarely where the violence interrupters are coming in that moment of potential retaliation after a gun violence event happens, to get to the people involved, to try to prevent the retaliatory cycle that fuels so much violence. So they do play an important role. They don't do it by themselves. And of course, the argument that we're spending millions of dollars on this and continuing to face violent crime

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Brian Schwalb: doesn't prove the point that they're not working, because of course the violent crime might be much worse if we don't have them. We have to recognize that while we are having a spike in violence in DC, so are communities all across the country, urban, suburban, and rural. We're not unique in this. So we're looking for solutions. One place, I think we need to focus is to make sure the collaboration and what we're learning in Cure the Streets, is filtered through a communicative process with what we're learning through building blocks

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Brian Schwalb: and ones and some of the good work that the mayor's office is doing. There isn't a one size fits all and Cure the Street has a unique model. We need to look at the data and see what's working and we need to communicate with one another to be in this together as a team to tackle a really, really tough problem.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Spiva, how would you improve Cure the Streets and what's your response to people who are concerned about interruption and prevention programs and their effectiveness?

Bruce Spiva: Well, I think it's really too early to say

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Bruce Spiva: you know, how effective it has been, but it certainly has shown promise. The National Institute of Criminal Justice Reform has said that we are resource rich in this area, but that we're coordination poor, because as my colleague alluded to the mayor's office also has a Violence Interruption Program and so I would work to try to coordinate these programs better. I believe in a culture of constant evaluation of all of our programs

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Bruce Spiva: including violence interruption programs that includes data, but some things are difficult to measure based on quantitative data. So we need qualitative evaluation as well, because you can't prove how many shootings didn't happen because of the existence of the program. So I'm generally supportive of these violence interruption programs. If anything, I think they probably need to be expanded, but we

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Bruce Spiva: certainly need to evaluate, we need to have a culture of constant evaluation and re-evaluation and tweaking and better coordination.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you and I'm just going to stick with you on that Mr. Spiva. You mentioned the resource rich and coordination poor quote, actually mentioned that at the mayoral debate last night, should there be any consideration given into consolidating some of these programs, for example, the program out of the mayor's office and Cure the Streets?

Bruce Spiva: Well, certainly

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Bruce Spiva: I think it should be considered. I'm certainly not going to take a position tonight and say that it definitely should be consolidated. Sometimes there are advantages to having a separate program that function uniquely and maybe try to go at a problem a slightly different way, but certainly there should be evaluation of that and hopefully coordination so that we're not reinventing the wheel or tripping all over ourselves,

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Bruce Spiva: but I wouldn't be prepared tonight to say that they definitely should be consolidated and in general I think that the idea and by the way, it's not true that there's no data anywhere, right? Because we know from what's going on in Oakland and Philadelphia and other cities that have had these programs longer than we have, that it actually has resulted in fewer violent crimes. So I think there's reason to be hopeful here,

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Bruce Spiva: but to be prepared, to evaluate, tweak, coordinate.

Michael Brice-Saddler: And Mr. Jones, what's your assessment of a Cure the Streets in the city's violence interruption and prevention efforts as a whole?

Ryan Jones: I've been critical of the program and being out and campaigning, people have corrected me and said, look, if you didn't have the program, crime would be worse. And I look at the redundancy issue that you guys have mentioned. Maybe we should coordinate better with the mayor's office

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Ryan Jones: that we're not having resources used in a way that diminishes the effectiveness. So I would look at seeing if there's any redundancy that we could eliminate and also enhance the effectiveness of the program and I look at Cure the Streets not just as going out and

dealing with the youth. We might need to look at the role of government and the issues that children or adults are having in violent crimes and see if violence interrupters

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Ryan Jones: can work with the police and prosecutors to eliminate crime from happening that stems from those interactions as well.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And I've noticed there hasn't been a lot of back and forth during this debate. So I'm going to try something that worked well yesterday in the mayoral debate. I like to give you each the opportunity to ask one of your opponents a question that they would have one minute to answer. So I'm going to start with Mr. Schwalb. Feel free to ask any of your opponents a question.

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Brian Schwalb: Well, thank you for that opportunity. You know, one of the things that I committed to my wife and my 3 daughters when I started this campaign was that I wanted to run a campaign that was consistent with my values and what I aspire politics to be, which is a discussion of the issues. I want to say that to both Bruce and Ryan, this campaign has been enjoyable even though we've spent a lot of time talking about issues. I've got a tremendous amount of respect and so sometimes this type of question is intended maybe to

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Brian Schwalb: become a little more divisive and I'm committed to trying to avoid that. So without completely ignoring your question, let me ask it this way. Assume when this election is over Mr. Jones and Mr. Spiva, and it will be over, I promise to pick up the tab. You tell me, where are we going for beers?

Michael Brice-Saddler: I don't know if I'd want to respond to that.

Ryan Jones: Over to you Bruce.

Bruce Spiva: The problem is if I answered then,

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Bruce Spiva: you know, one of the places that I go to will be offended, because, you know, I didn't provide that name. So, why don't we say somewhere in ward 4. [U/A]

Brian Schwalb: Yeah, it's a deal.

Michael Brice-Saddler: This may very well be the most diplomatic debate I've ever seen. Mr. Spiva, would you like to ask one of your opponents a question?

Bruce Spiva: Well, I think you would have to question my judgment if after

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Bruce Spiva: such a magnanimous question as that from my friend of 30 years, I were to turn around and try to put a real zinger to him or to Mr. Jones, who I also admire. So I think I'm going to take a pass as well, you know, I want to focus on what I bring to the table and why I think I would be the most effective and a very effective

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Bruce Spiva: proponent, advancer of the public interest in the job, but I think my opponents also have strengths that I admire as well.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. Mr. Jones, would you ask [U/A] a question?

Ryan Jones: Yeah, I'm going to punt on this. My colleagues know I have a great deal of respect for both of them and I'm not going to join the party of trying to make this [U/A].

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Ryan Jones: So I just want to keep it on the high road and, you know, aim high and give the residents the best opportunity to see who's best for them in the long run.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Well then I'll try to stick with that theme and point out that many people I've spoken with who followed this race have observed a lot of similarities between the three of you, in terms of what you stand for, even some of your visions for the office

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Michael Brice-Saddler: and you expressed clearly some of those similarities today, all agreeing not to ask a question for your opponent. So what position idea or policy separates you, Mr. Schwalb?

Brian Schwalb: I think that we need to focus on what I'm bringing to the job. I alone was at the Department of Justice. I came back to DC after law school and a clerkship to join the justice department during the Clinton administration. I know what it's like

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Brian Schwalb: to be in the public sector, enforcing the laws, and I stood up at the Justice Department for the United States, just like I and the people working for me will stand up for the District of Columbia. I've got a wide breadth of legal experience. I've certainly tried lots of different cases. I've tried death penalty cases in Alabama and represented clients who were the victims of excessive force from our police, but I've also tried complex commercial and real estate and civil cases and the practice of the attorney general is multi-varied.

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Brian Schwalb: It requires a broad array of knowledge and experience and the judgment that is learned over that. I've spent a lot of time in leadership, leading and training and mentoring and recruiting lawyers. I know how to teach and bring teams together. I'm independent and

I importantly am a fair election candidate and I think that is a very important distinguishing factor when decisions are being made about who people will vote for.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. Appreciate that. And, to Mr. Spiva, I'd like to

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Michael Brice-Saddler: give you the opportunity to weigh in as you're the only candidate here that is using traditional financing over the city's Fair Elections Program and that decision has drawn some criticism. So what was your calculus in doing that?

Bruce Spiva: Sure. And I'll answer that, but I hope that I do get a chance to answer the other question that my colleague answered.

Michael Brice-Saddler: You can.

Bruce Spiva: About what's unique. So let me start with the fair elections. I decided as a first-time candidate with low name recognition that

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Bruce Spiva: I needed to have the ability to invest in my own campaign, to raise my name recognition, but I've made a pledge and I have not taken any donations from developers. That's not true of my friend from Venable. I am not taking any corporate PAC money. In fact, the largest investor in my campaign, the largest contributor to my campaign is myself.

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Bruce Spiva: I'm not beholden to anybody in this campaign other than the people of Washington DC. There's no one who has given me money, who I owe anything to or that wants anything from the other than to serve the people in the public interest as I've done-

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you.

Bruce Spiva: - for 30 years.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And once before I give you a chance to talk about why you stand out. I want to give Mr. Schwalb a chance for a rebuttal.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Spiva did criticize you for taking donations from developers.

Brian Schwalb: Look, I too am a first time candidate. I too started this campaign with no name recognition. Part of judging, who brings judgment and discretion to this is to look at the decisions we've made as candidates. We've talked about that earlier. It was a critical threshold decision on whether to participate in the Fair Election Program. I didn't know whether it was going to be tactically to my advantage to fund my own

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Brian Schwalb: campaign or to try to raise larger dollar contributions and I thought the right thing to do the exercise of judgment was to play by the rules. If any office should do it, it should be the attorney general to do it and that's what I did. And yes, it is true that I have complete transparency. So Mr. Spiva can look and see who has contributed no more than \$200 to my campaign, but we don't have any transparency into what has been happening in his campaign, how much money is going into it, whether it's loan or whether it's given.

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Brian Schwalb: So transparency is important and judgment is important and to suggest that some transparency that I've committed to is now going to be used to reconfigure the decision that was made not to participate in the program is just unfair.

Bruce Spiva: Can I respond to that? Because he's raised new issues that I hadn't gotten a chance to respond to.

Michael Brice-Saddler: 30 seconds.

Bruce Spiva: First of all, it's not true that there is no transparency. Yes. It's not true that there's no transparency. You know, I I've had to file papers and

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Bruce Spiva: I will have to file papers again in June. So it's completely transparent and second of all I made the decision to leave my firm. So there is no subordinate who is giving money to me in my campaign. That's not true, Mr. Schwalb, who still sits as the managing partner of the DC office of his firm.

Brian Schwalb: The only money I've given to my campaign is \$200. My wife and I, that's the only money that has come from me and I haven't put [O/V]

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Brian Schwalb: thousands of dollars and so, you know, that the notion that there's a false equivalency, we both started as first-time candidates with no name recognition, having committed our lives to the practice of law and one of us chose to participate in the program and one didn't.

Michael Brice-Saddler: [O/V] Sorry, Ryan Jones. I want to give you a chance to weigh in on this back and forth if you'd like.

Ryan Jones: Between Bruce and Brian, right now, [U/A]

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Ryan Jones: I'd imagine that these two Harvard law grads that came out in the same class, wouldn't be going at each other's throats. These guys are friends. I don't think this really matters. You guys did what you thought was best as first time candidates, just as I did, you know, to go out and ask 500 people to contribute to your campaign and try to establish name recognition in the short amount of time as a difficult enterprise, I've done it myself and it

is very difficult. So congratulations to both of you for doing what you've done. I don't think we should hold anybody to speak to the fire for what they've chosen to do for their respective positions.

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And I want to get back to the question I had originally asked, Mr. Spiva, to give you an opportunity, what makes you stand out most?

Bruce Spiva: I think it's the breadth and depth of my public interest experience over 30 years fighting for public housing residents, fighting for low income, black, brown, and Asian residents in Columbia Heights, fighting for sexual assault survivors, fighting for class actions,

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Bruce Spiva: something that my opponents do not bring. I, on the other hand, have all of the experience that my friend talked about and more. I have not only tried cases all over this country in a wide variety of areas, mainly in the public interest, including voting rights. I also have had an active appellate practice arguing in many of the circuits around the country in the United States Supreme Court. I also have been the manager of a large office. I've also founded and maintained my own firm fighting for the public interest, and

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Bruce Spiva: also sat as a member of the executive committee, the governing body of Perkins Coie firm of over 1200 lawyers and over \$1.1 billion in revenue. I have the judgment and the vision born of experience to lead this office and to forward the public interest while doing so.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you. And Mr. Jones, what position idea or policy separates you most from your opponents?

Ryan Jones: Well, I decided to run because I knew that there was a need for change in leadership. We need new visions.

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Ryan Jones: We need new bold leaders to step to the plate so that we don't continue to see the problems that we've seen for so long. When I talk about myself and what I've done in my career, it is unique. When I started my law firm, it put me first chair in a lot of matters. I've been in federal district court. I've been in DC superior court, civil, criminal, family, probate, landlord, tenant, smalls, claims. I've been in the court of appeals where I've been successful, the Office of Administrative Hearings, taking on hundreds of cases there on behalf of district

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Ryan Jones: employers and residents. I know where the fires reside in our courts that affect DC residents the most and started to run, or I decided to run in order to cure those problems. I differentiate myself from my colleagues in that I have a trajectory that's upwards in this legal sphere and I have new ideas for how the legal practice should go from here

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Ryan Jones: given the plight that we're currently in with the pandemic and the practice of law changing right before our eyes.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Jones, and we've reached near the end of our program. We're going to ask one more question. So AG Karl Racine has gone after the Trump

administration quite a bit. I wanted to ask you all, are there ways DC needs to stand up to the federal government right now? Mr. Schwalb, I'll start with you on that.

Brian Schwalb: I think we need to make sure

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Brian Schwalb: we're advocating to our federal government right now to recognize if not statehood and candidly I don't think we have the votes like the line from Hamilton. You don't have the votes. It is a political question and what we need to continue to advocate it, we also need to push our federal government for greater expansion of home rule for more control over our budget. The redefinition of a Child Act is pending and that too would expand some of the very important decision-making that our

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Brian Schwalb: voters and the people who live in DC will have over control over their lives. I think we need to push for more control over how we get our judges on the superior court and the Court of Appeals. We don't need a, a federal process. Our mayor could nominate and our city council could approve judges, bring down the number of judges we have is a real problem in terms of making sure our justice system works and when our justice system doesn't work, our democracy is at risk. So those are ways in terms of expanding home rule that I think as AG

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Brian Schwalb: the work needs to be done immediately.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Schwalb and Mr. Jones, are there ways you feel DC needs to stand up to the federal government?

Ryan Jones: We talk about what we didn't receive during the pandemic. How do we advocate for our city who is being taxed while not having representation. That's stained in our membranes as people who are from here, you're seeing that on our [U/A]. We need to see that change.

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Ryan Jones: We need to see it'd be the first few first state. We need to see it come into existence. The federal government should not be using district as some sort of testing ground for ideas, for people who are putting forth ideas from other jurisdictions like Texas. We need to have control over our laws without interference from the federal government. However, we do significantly rely on the operation. It is a part of our ecosystem and we should have a more collaborative experience. However, it's going to

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Ryan Jones: take a lot of hard work, tireless effort on behalf of our leadership and I will do just that. There's no one thing that I can point to, but when these issues do occur, I will be on the front lines taking them on.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Spiva, I'm going to go to you with that question as well before we get to closing. What does DC need to stand up or are there ways DC needs to stand up to the federal government right now?

Bruce Spiva: Yes. I mean the federal government in addition to the ways my colleagues mentioned

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Bruce Spiva: continues to interfere with our ability to implement through appropriate regulations our marijuana laws and so we need to stand up to that. We also need an attorney general who has been involved in these fights for decades, because it gives you a creative mind and

leads you not to be overly cautious. Budget autonomy is a good example of that. That was a fight that I was involved in 10 years ago, where we were able to achieve a degree of budget autonomy

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Bruce Spiva: through referendum. Unfortunately, we had to fight [U/A].

Michael Brice-Saddler: It looks like we might've lost Mr. Spiva [U/A]. There seems to be having a little connectivity trouble [U/A].

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Michael Brice-Saddler: Mr. Spiva. All right. Well, we are going to move to the closing statements. We have come to the end of our time. Tonight's debate must end. The question and answer portion of the evening is over. I'm going to give each candidate a chance to make a 1-minute closing statement. I'm going to start with Mr. Schwalb.

Brian Schwalb: Well, thank you. I'm a third generation Washingtonian. My three daughters are fourth generation Washingtonians.

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Brian Schwalb: I love this city. There is much to be proud of, notwithstanding the big, significant challenges we've talked about tonight and others, but one thing we should all be very, very proud of is the state of our Office of Attorney General. We are recognized across the country as one of the premier state AGs anywhere, in terms of inequality and the issues that have been taken on and successfully litigated and advocated. I'm very proud that our current Attorney General Karl Racine, our first independently elected attorney general

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Brian Schwalb: has endorsed me as has the prior attorney general Irv Nathan. Irv Nathan was the last appointed attorney general and Irv Nathan and Karl Racine approach their jobs very differently. But the fact that both of those gentlemen who probably know better than anybody in the city what it takes to do this job, to be ready to do the job, to have the judgment and independence to do the job on day one have supported me is something I'm very proud of. I'm very proud that The Washington Post has endorsed me and I'm hoping that the voters

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Brian Schwalb: on June 21st will also support me and support my run to be our next attorney general and thank you.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Schwalb. And we're going to Ryan Jones next for your closing statement. You have one minute.

Ryan Jones: Thank you. I started this campaign in order to create a change that we so desperately need. My legal experience has given me the proper experience needed to properly address the issues confronting the district today in the Office of Attorney General.

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Ryan Jones: We need new thoughts. We need new leaders. We've experienced the hardships of a system that hasn't worked. We need to rewire the system to uplift and empower people. I represent that and I want to do that for you as your attorney, the chief legal mind for the district government, so that it meets people where they need it the most. When I talk about myself, I only do it to give people the confidence to know that I have the requisite skills to do this. I've represented people in order to be a social engineer in the district.

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Ryan Jones: I've represented [U/A] companies and high profile individuals, such as a former US cabinet member when confronting significant legal issues in our courts, all the preparation to succeed on day one for all residents in the District of Columbia. I'm running for us, we deserve a fighter. I just happened to embody the thought capital and values of who we need right now to fix these wrongs for better brighter DC for all.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you Mr. Jones, and Mr. Spiva, you have the last word, one minute.

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Bruce Spiva: Thank you. I apologize for my connectivity problems. You know, a great Washingtonian, Frederick Douglas once said power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. When we see injustices, we must never walk away. We have a moral obligation to fight, to try to change it. That is the reason we were put on this earth and that is why I want to be your attorney general. I will wake up every morning thinking about

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Bruce Spiva: how to make positive change for everyday people. These are not aspirations that came along for me during this election season. I've got a lifelong record of fighting for the people and winning. So if you want a leader who is the most experienced and best prepared based on what I've been doing the last 30 years to lead an office of 700 professionals to fight for the people and if you want a leader who is willing when necessary to walk up the rough side of the mountain

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Bruce Spiva: and face the heat of the day for you and to inspire others to join us, send me, I'm ready and eager to do the job and to achieve results for the people. I ask you support and your vote. Thank you.

Michael Brice-Saddler: Thank you, Mr. Spiva and that concludes our debate. To learn more about how to vote in the selection visit dcboe.org and remember to visit dcdebates.com

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Michael Brice-Saddler: to watch this debate and others in their entirety. Thank you to all of our candidates, our community partners, and the Office of Campaign Finance for hosting tonight's debate. Good night.

[END RECORDING DC Attorney General Primary Debate Hosted by the Office of Campaign Finance]