



**Houston Hall,
University of
Pennsylvania**

JULY 16
2026



July 16



Agenda

8:00 AM

Doors Open

9:00 AM

Event Begins

9:20 AM

**Guardrails of Democracy:
Defending the Rule of Law**

10:45 AM

**The Information Crisis:
Media, Trust, and Democracy**

12:00 PM

Lunch & Networking

1:00 PM

**The Participation Gap:
Understanding and
Reducing Voter Apathy**

2:15 PM

**Bridging the Divide: Paths to
Reducing Political Polarization**

3:15 PM

**The Rebalance of Power:
Congress Reclaiming Its Role**

4:30 PM

Plenary Keynote

5:30 PM

Event Ends

July 16, 2026

Dear Friends,

Welcome to ***The Promise of Democracy: 250 Years and the Path Ahead***. There is no better place on earth to have this conversation than Philadelphia. The ideals that launched this republic—equality, liberty, and the radical notion that government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed—were debated into existence in this city. Two hundred and fifty years later, we gather here again to ask what those ideals demand of us right now, and what we must build to honor them for the next 250 years.

The Committee of Seventy has been part of that work since 1904. For more than a century, we have stood for free and fair elections, ethical and transparent government, and an engaged and empowered citizenry. This summit is an extension of that mission and a recognition that this moment demands more than commemoration. It demands honest reckoning. It demands action.

Today's program reflects the full complexity of the challenge before us. You will hear from clear-eyed thinkers, advocates, and public servants working on the front lines of democracy: examining the rule of law under pressure, the crisis of information and trust, the forces that drive Americans apart, the barriers that keep too many from participating, and the urgent need to restore accountability across our branches of government. These conversations will be direct, cross-partisan, and grounded in evidence. We did not convene this room for easy agreement.

This evening, we close with a dialogue between two of America's most compelling public voices, Roxane Gay and David Brooks, moderated by WHY?Y's Cherri Gregg. It is a conversation that reaches beyond policy into something deeper: what democracy means in our cultural and civic life, and what it asks of us as citizens living through a consequential moment.

None of this would be possible without the generosity of those who made it real—our funders and sponsors, our institutional partners, our media partners, and the members of our Board, whose leadership and vision sustain everything we do.

The answer to democratic backsliding isn't nostalgia. It's building civic muscle. We hope you leave today with more than insight—with a sharpened sense of what you can do, in your community, your profession, and your daily life, to strengthen the democratic fabric that connects us all.

Today's content will be recorded and shared in full on our website and through our media partners. And a cohort of regional educators is already turning today's sessions into classroom resources, so the ideas raised in this room reach students and adults long after today.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for caring. And thank you for your commitment to the promise of American democracy.

With gratitude and determination,



Lauren Cristella
President & CEO
Committee of Seventy



Thomas Hutton
Chair, Board of Directors
Committee of Seventy





BREAKFAST

BAGELS (WHEAT, GF, VEGAN)

BREAKFAST BREADS

CROISSANTS

DANISH

MUFFINS

(WHEAT, GF & VEGAN, VEGAN)

FRESH SLICED FRUIT

COFFEE, TEA, JUICE, & WATER

BOXED LUNCHES

FRESH MOZZARELLA
WITH PESTO, FRESH BASIL
& TOMATO (VEG)

FRESH ROASTED TURKEY
BREAST, BLACK FOREST HAM
WITH SWISS CHEESE,
LETTUCE, TOMATO, MAYO
& COLE SLAW (GF)

FRESH ROASTED
TURKEY BREAST *WITH*
BRIE, HONEY MUSTARD,
LETTUCE & TOMATOES

CHEF'S TUNA SALAD
WITH BEEF STEAK
TOMATOES & LETTUCE

SLICED GRILLED CHICKEN
BREAST IN A BALSAMIC
VINAIGRETTE
WITH A TOUCH OF GARLIC,
TRICOLOR ROASTED
PEPPERS & ARUGULA

ROAST BEEF *WITH*
SHARP PROVOLONE,
LETTUCE, TOMATO &
HORSERADISH

APPLE-WOOD
SMOKED TURKEY *WITH*
HAVARTI, TOMATOES &
ARTICHOKE TAPENADE

MESQUITE GRILLED CHICKEN
WITH LETTUCE, TOMATO &
HONEY BBQ GLAZE

PARMESAN CRUSTED
CHICKEN, HONEY BALSAMIC
DRIZZLE *WITH ARUGULA &*
TOMATO SALAD

SIDES

PASTA PRIMAVERA (VEGAN)

GERMAN POTATO SALAD (GF)

DESSERTS

COOKIES

PRESENTING SPONSOR



FOUNDING PARTNERS

Lisa Detwiler, Esq.



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ABOUT THE THE COMMITTEE OF SEVENTY

The **COMMITTEE OF SEVENTY** is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that has promoted, supported and facilitated government ethics and election integrity for more than a century.

Seventy advocates for free, fair, safe and secure elections and works to ensure that every eligible voter votes, is informed when they vote, and votes with confidence.

For more information, visit [seventy.org](https://www.seventy.org)

C70 MISSION

The Committee of Seventy is a nonpartisan civic leadership organization that advances representative, ethical and effective government in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania through public policy advocacy and citizen engagement.

C70 VISION

We envision our City and Commonwealth with a vibrant local democracy and trustworthy government.

C70 VALUES

Integrity

We believe government must always prioritize the public's interests over personal interests. Strong institutions with safeguards against corruption, fraud and abuse of power are necessary. However, the character and judgment of those who serve in government are no less important. Transparency, as well as a free and independent media, are essential to maintain the public trust because they guarantee government is held accountable.

Representation

We believe governments should be representative of and responsive to the people. Free, fair, safe and secure elections create a strong representative government. Achieving this means that all eligible voters can cast ballots in secure and well-run elections, voters are informed about the candidates and the issues, political boundaries are drawn without manipulation to advantage one group over another, and well-funded special interests are unable to overpower the public interest.

Effective Governance

We believe government is most effective when it functions as an efficient, modern and responsible public resource. The Committee of Seventy believes that to be good stewards of citizen resources, government should be both effective and efficient. Government, we believe, owes it to citizens to get the right things done well. This requires identifying and implementing best practices and reforms that improve government operations and that leverage data to drive results and ensure transparency.

9:20 AM

Guardrails of Democracy: Defending the Rule of Law

The rule of law is a foundational pillar of democratic stability. This session examines how legal institutions hold up under political pressure and how recent events are shaping public understanding of constitutional norms. Leaders in law, civil rights, and national security will discuss what is required to preserve the integrity of democratic systems.

DAVID BECKER

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & FOUNDER, CENTER FOR
ELECTION INNOVATION & RESEARCH (CEIR)**

Election law expert David Becker leads the nonpartisan, nonprofit Center for Election Innovation & Research. Becker has more than 25 years of experience in elections, having previously led the elections team at The Pew Charitable Trusts and served in the U.S. Department of Justice in both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations. Becker is co-author of *The Big Truth: Upholding Democracy in the Age of the Big Lie*.



JEH JOHNSON

**FORMER U.S. SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY
AND CO-CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AT
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

Jeh Johnson served as U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security from 2013 to 2017 and previously held senior positions in the Obama and Clinton administrations. Johnson spent most of his professional career at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison before retiring in 2025. He currently serves on the boards of MetLife and the National September 11 Memorial & Museum and is a frequent commentator on national news programs.



JUDGE JOHN JONES III

**FORMER U.S. DISTRICT COURT JUDGE,
CURRENT PRESIDENT OF DICKINSON COLLEGE**

John E. Jones III is Dickinson College's 30th president, where he has overseen rapid campus renovations and record philanthropic campaigns. Jones retired as chief judge of the U.S. Middle District Court of Pennsylvania in 2021. Appointed in 2002, he presided over landmark constitutional cases, striking down the teaching of intelligent design in public schools and Pennsylvania's same-sex marriage ban. Named one of TIME's 100 most influential people in 2006, Jones has received numerous accolades honoring judicial independence.



MARY SMITH

**AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION FORMER PRESIDENT,
TASK FORCE FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY**

Mary Smith was President of the American Bar Association (ABA) from 2023-2024, the first Native American woman in this role. Ms. Smith currently serves as CEO of the Task Force for American Democracy and serves on the board of PTC Therapeutics, Inc. Previously, Smith was the CEO of the Indian Health Service, a \$6 billion national healthcare system. Ms. Smith is also Vice Chair of the VENG Group. Ms. Smith has received numerous awards, including being named to *Forbes* 50 over 50 in 2024.



KERMIT ROOSEVELT

**PROFESSOR FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE,
UPENN LAW SCHOOL, (MODERATOR)**

Kermit Roosevelt is a professor of constitutional law at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, a former clerk for Supreme Court Justice David Souter, a member of the Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court, a member of the American Law Institute, and an award-winning author. His latest book, *The Nation That Never Was*, argues that America's true founding values come not from an exclusionary Declaration of Independence, but from the struggles and Amendments of Reconstruction.



10:45 AM

The Information Crisis: Media, Trust, and Democracy

Americans are navigating an increasingly complex and divided information landscape. This session explores misinformation, declining trust, and how news organizations and online influencers can help build a healthier information ecosystem. Journalists and scholars will discuss the challenges facing modern newsrooms and strategies for strengthening public trust.

RENÉE DIRESTA

**GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, FORMER RESEARCH
MANAGER AT STANFORD INTERNET OBSERVATORY**

Renée DiResta is an Associate Research Professor at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy and author of *Invisible Rulers: The People Who Turn Lies into Reality*. A leading researcher on online influence operations, misinformation, and technology policy, she has advised Congress, the White House, and business leaders. DiResta previously led investigations into Russian election interference for the Senate Intelligence Committee and served as Technical Research Manager at the Stanford Internet Observatory.



KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON

**DIRECTOR OF UPENN ANNEBERG PUBLIC POLICY
CENTER, CREATOR OF FACTCHECK.ORG**

Kathleen Hall Jamieson is the Elizabeth Ware Packard Professor at UPenn's Annenberg School for Communication and Director Emerita of the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC). She is the co-founder of FactCheck.org, and the founder of the Civics Renewal Network (CRN) and Annenberg Classroom. Jamieson serves as the director of The Sunnylands Constitution Project, which has produced more than thirty award-winning films on the Constitution for high school students.



RACHEL LOBDELL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NEWS CREATOR CORPS

Rachel Lobdell leads the News Creator Corps, a nonprofit that trains content creators and community messengers in journalism skills to combat misinformation and strengthen civic engagement.

Previously, she held newsroom leadership and editorial strategy roles at *Gannett*, *Fortune*, *VICE*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *the Los Angeles Times*, and *the Sun Sentinel*. A recognized leader in creator journalism and audience engagement, Lobdell advocates for trusted online voices as a means of strengthening communities and rebuilding trust in information.



DANNAGAL YOUNG

DIRECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE'S CENTER FOR POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Dr. Dannagal G. Young is an award-winning author, public-facing scholar, and TED Speaker. Her work explores how and why people make sense of their worlds—and the role played by media technologies in those processes. Dr. Young has published over seventy academic articles, chapters, and books on the effects of political and health-related information and misinformation.



ERRIN HAINES

EDITOR AT LARGE, *THE 19TH**, (MODERATOR)

Errin Haines is an award-winning journalist, editor-at-large and founding mother of *The 19th**, where she authors *The Amendment* newsletter and hosts the podcast of the same name. An MSNBC political contributor and former Associated Press national writer on race and ethnicity, she is also president of the National Association of Black Journalists. Haines has spent her career elevating underrepresented voices and advancing diversity in journalism.



1:00 PM

The Participation Gap: Understanding and Reducing Voter Apathy

Voter turnout remains highly uneven across age, race, geography, and socioeconomic status. This session explores what drives disengagement and what motivates participation. Pollsters, analysts, and civic leaders will examine insights from national research and identify strategies to convert apathy into meaningful democratic involvement.

MARC MORIAL

**PRESIDENT AND CEO OF
THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE**

Marc H. Morial is the President and CEO of the National Urban League, the nation's largest historic civil rights and economic justice organization. As mayor of New Orleans, he led a renaissance that slashed both violent crime and unemployment by more than half, leaving office with a 70% approval rating. He is the author of *The Gumbo Coalition: 10 Leadership Lessons That Help You Inspire, Unite, and Achieve*.



AL SCHMIDT

**SECRETARY OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA**

Al Schmidt has served as Pennsylvania's Secretary of the Commonwealth since 2023, following his appointment by Governor Josh Shapiro. Previously, he was president and CEO of the Committee of Seventy and served for a decade as a Philadelphia City Commissioner, where he helped modernize election administration and strengthen election integrity. Schmidt also worked as a senior performance analyst at the U.S. Government Accountability Office. He holds a doctorate in history from Brandeis University.



CELINA STEWART

**CEO OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF THE UNITED STATES**

Celina Stewart leads the League of Women Voters, empowering voters and defending democracy. Stewart has also held leadership positions with electoral reform and civic organizations, serving as counsel to Stacey Abrams and Executive Director of the Congressional Black Caucus Institute. A prominent advocate for voting rights, she frequently appears in national media and has testified before Congress on election policy.



RICH THAU

**PRESIDENT OF ENGAGIOUS AND CREATOR
OF THE SWING VOTER PROJECT**

Rich Thau is the president of Engagious, which specializes in public policy message testing for trade associations and advocacy groups. He's the moderator and creator of the Swing Voter Project, where he conducts monthly online focus groups with swing-state voters who supported President Biden in 2020 and President Trump in 2024. He's also the moderator of the 2026 Deciders focus group project in partnership with NBC News and Syracuse University, conducting focus groups with key voting blocs.



HEIDI PRZYBYLA

FOUNDER, GET REAL NEWS, (MODERATOR)

Heidi Przybyla is President of *Get Real News*, where she is pioneering new approaches to connecting rigorous journalism with audiences on digital platforms. An award-winning investigative reporter with more than 25 years at NBC News, *USA Today*, POLITICO, and Bloomberg, she was part of a George Polk Award-winning team and a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Through *Get Real*, Przybyla works to combat polarization by expanding access to trusted reporting through innovative distribution models and creator partnerships.



2:15 PM

Bridging the Divide: Paths to Reducing Political Polarization

Polarization now defines American public life across culture, politics, and community. This panel examines what fuels division and what can help bridge it. The session explores leadership models, reforms that encourage cooperation, media pressures, and practical strategies for strengthening trust and dialogue across differences.

REP. CHRISSEY HOULAHAN

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE, PA-06 AND AIR FORCE VETERAN

Rep. Houlahan is serving her fourth consecutive term representing the people of Pennsylvania's 6th Congressional District (Chester and southern Berks Counties). An Air Force veteran, Houlahan is the first female veteran to be named as Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee's Military Personnel Subcommittee and a member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Houlahan is also chair of the Economic Growth and Cost of Living Task Force on the New Democrat Coalition.



MATT LEVENDUSKY

**DIRECTOR, INSTITUTIONS OF DEMOCRACY,
UPENN ANNEBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER**

Matthew Levendusky is Professor of Political Science and Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and holds the Stephen and Mary Baran Chair in the Institutions of Democracy at the Annenberg Public Policy Center. A leading scholar of political behavior, polarization, partisan media, and democratic institutions, he is the author of influential books including *How Partisan Media Polarize America* and *Our Common Bonds*. His research has earned numerous honors, including a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2025.



MAX STIER

CEO, PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Max Stier is the founding president and CEO of the nonpartisan, nonprofit Partnership for Public Service. He previously served on the staff of Congressman Jim Leach. He clerked for Chief Judge James Oakes of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, and clerked for Justice David Souter of the United States Supreme Court. Between his clerkships, he served as special litigation counsel to Assistant Attorney General Anne Bingaman at the Department of Justice.



KRISH O'MARA VIGNARAJAH

PRESIDENT & CEO OF GLOBAL REFUGE

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah is the President and CEO of Global Refuge. She previously served in the White House as Policy Director for First Lady Michelle Obama and at the State Department as Senior Advisor under Secretaries of State Clinton and Kerry. Krish attended Yale College, was a Marshall Scholar at Oxford University, and returned to Yale Law School, where she served on the Yale Law Journal.



MICHAEL SMERCONISH

HOST OF THE MICHAEL SMERCONISH PROGRAM AND HOST OF CNN'S SMERCONISH, (MODERATOR)

Michael Smerconish is a nationally syndicated radio host on SiriusXM's POTUS channel and host of CNN's *Smerconish*. A longtime columnist for the *Philadelphia Daily News* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, he is the author of eight books, including *Clowns to the Left of Me, Jokers to the Right*. His one-man show, *Things I Wish I Knew Before I Started Talking*, streams on major platforms. He is a graduate of Lehigh University and the University of Pennsylvania Law School.



3:15 PM

The Rebalance of Power: Congress Reclaiming Its Role

When the framers drafted the Constitution in Philadelphia 239 years ago, one of the most crucial components they agreed upon was a system of checks and balances across the federal government. Those checks are significantly weakened in modern day governance. Panelists will consider how the other two branches, particularly Congress, can rebalance the scales.

JIM GERLACH

FORMER U.S. REPRESENTATIVE, PA-06

Jim Gerlach served 24 years in elected office, including six terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. During his congressional tenure, he championed legislation on issues including veterans, public health, and environmental protection. After leaving office, Gerlach led major business and civic organizations, including the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance. He now supports civic education and democratic engagement through PA Civics and the Democracy Defense Project.



GLENN NYE

**PRESIDENT & CEO OF THE CENTER FOR THE
STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY & CONGRESS,
FORMER U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM VA**

Glenn Nye leads the Center for the Study of the Presidency & Congress, a nonpartisan think tank focused on leadership development, institutional reform, and strengthening American democracy. A former U.S. Representative from Virginia's 2nd District, Nye earned a reputation for bipartisan problem-solving and cross-party collaboration. His work centers on making the nation's political institutions more functional, responsive, and effective while preparing the next generation of civic and public leaders.



RAMESH PONNURU

EDITOR OF NATIONAL REVIEW, NONRESIDENT SENIOR FELLOW AT THE AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Ramesh Ponnuru is a nonresident senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where he studies politics and public policy with a particular focus on the future of conservatism. Concurrently, he is the editor of *National Review*, where he has covered national politics and public policy for 25 years, and a columnist for *The Washington Post*.



REP. MARY GAY SCANLON

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE, PA-05

Representative Mary Gay Scanlon has represented Pennsylvania's 5th Congressional District since 2018. A former attorney dedicated to public service, she has focused her congressional work on voting rights, access to justice, education, economic opportunity, gun safety, women's rights, and ending hunger. Scanlon serves on the House Judiciary and Rules Committees and is Ranking Member of the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution and Limited Government. She also chairs the House Caucuses on Access to Legal Aid, Youth Mentoring, and Foster Youth.



SARAH GLOVER

VICE PRESIDENT OF NEWS & CIVIC DIALOGUE AT WHY?, (MODERATOR)

Sarah Glover is a veteran journalist with over three decades of experience in local news. Previously, she served as managing editor at MPR News and held leadership roles at NBC-owned stations, including NBC10 Philadelphia. Beginning her career as a photojournalist at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Philadelphia Daily News*, Glover has built a reputation for elevating community-centered storytelling and civic engagement. She was a 2021 Nieman Visiting Fellow at Harvard University.



4:30–5:30 PM

Plenary Keynote

To close the day, two of America's most distinctive and provocative public voices sit down for a conversation that moves beyond policy and into something harder to quantify: what democracy means in our cultural and civic lives, and what it asks of us as citizens, as writers, and as people living through a genuinely consequential moment in history. Moderated by WHYY's Cheri Gregg, this is the conversation that earns the day.

ROXANE GAY

**CONTRIBUTING OPINION WRITER AT
THE NEW YORK TIMES AND BESTSELLING AUTHOR**

Roxane Gay is an internationally acclaimed writer, cultural critic, and public intellectual whose work explores identity, power, politics, culture, and the complexities of contemporary life. Through her bestselling books, essays, journalism, and commentary, she has become one of the most influential voices shaping conversations about society, citizenship, belonging, and the human experience.

A contributing opinion writer for *The New York Times*, Gay is the bestselling author of *Bad Feminist*, *Hunger*, *Difficult Women*, *An Untamed State*, and *Ayiti*. Her writing has appeared in many of the nation's leading literary and cultural publications, including *The Best American Short Stories*, *The Best American Mystery Stories*, *Tin House*, *McSweeney's*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *Oxford American*.

Known for her intellectual rigor, cultural insight, and deeply human storytelling, Gay brings nuance, empathy, humor, and honesty to discussions about the forces shaping American society. Her work challenges audiences to think critically about democracy, identity, and the ways people navigate an increasingly complex world.



DAVID BROOKS

**THE ATLANTIC, PBS NEWS HOUR, AND
FORMER COLUMNIST FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES**



David Brooks is a bestselling author, commentator, and public intellectual whose work explores American culture, politics, character, and community. He serves as Yale University's Jackson School of Global Affairs' first Presidential Senior Fellow, is a contributing writer for *The Atlantic*, and is a longtime commentator on PBS NewsHour. For two decades, Brooks was one of the nation's most widely read opinion columnists at *The New York Times*.

Brooks is the author of six books, including the bestsellers *How to Know a Person*, *The Second Mountain*, *The Road to Character*, and *The Social Animal*. His writing examines how relationships, commitments, and community shape meaningful lives and healthy societies. In *How to Know a Person*, he argues that the ability to truly see and value others is essential to strengthening organizations, communities, and democracy itself.

Committed to putting these ideas into practice, Brooks founded and chairs Weave: The Social Fabric Project at the Aspen Institute, which promotes connection and community-building across American life. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has received more than 30 honorary degrees.

CHERRI GREGG

WHYY, HOST OF "STUDIO 2," (MODERATOR)



Cherri Gregg is co-host of WHYY's flagship daily news program *Studio 2* and executive producer and host of the Emmy Award-winning *Good Souls Project*. A journalist and attorney, she previously covered civil rights, race, and public affairs for KYW Newsradio and CBS 3, where she created and hosted *Flashpoint with Cherri Gregg*. She also founded Create Genius Media and serves on the board of the Law & Justice Journalism Project.

*The Philadelphia Funder Collaborative for the
Semiquincentennial salutes the Committee of
Seventy's Promise of Democracy Summit!*



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Lisa Detwiler, Esq.

**Thank you to the Committee of Seventy
for their ongoing commitment to the
PROMISE OF DEMOCRACY**



**Be a champion of local democracy
and become a member today!**

Visit seventy.org/membership

