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Contact: [info@Statchen2018.com](mailto:info@Statchen2018.com)

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## **Senator Heather Somers Rejects Debate Invitation from High School Politics Club**

Stonington, Connecticut – On August 30, 2018, the Co-Presidents of the Stonington High School Politics Club extended a debate invitation to the two state senate candidates for the 18<sup>th</sup> District. The students offered three potential dates in October, had obtained permission from the school administration to conduct the debate in the school auditorium and had coordinated with the League of Women Voters to organize the format in a standard manner. They intended for the questions to be generated from the Politics Club, other students and community members who wished to submit a question for approval. As explained in the email invitation:

*The goal of this debate, similar to the mission of Politics Club, is to encourage civic engagement and political awareness in the youngest block of voters or future voters. . . [W]e are constantly seeking out opportunities to motivate our generation to exercise their right to [vote]. This setting will allow students to hear your perspectives on the issues that we care about--ones oftentimes less prioritized by those of older age. This is an opportunity for the two candidates to reach a small, yet important, demographic of voters that is often overlooked by politicians.*

Democratic candidate Bob Statchen responded on August 31, that he was available all three days and looked forward to the event. In subsequent conversations, representatives of the SHS Politics Club indicated that they intended to reach out to other high schools in the district and invite them to participate as well. **Statchen was notified last week by the club that the invitation for a student-led debate was rejected by the Somers campaign** and the students were told they should submit their questions to news outlets that are conducting debates.

“I can think of no more important role for a public servant than engaging with the youth that they represent and making every effort to encourage them to participate in our democracy,” said Statchen. “These young leaders showed real initiative in offering this event. To flatly reject their efforts is incredibly disappointing. Now more than ever, we should be encouraging civil public discourse amongst all our citizens. Many of these impressive young people will not be

able to vote in this cycle, and yet they are still fully engaged in civic life. Our kids deserve much better than to be ignored by their elected representative.”

As an alternative, Statchen will be accepting an opportunity to speak with the students’ civics classes in the near future.