News



Democratic presidential nominee and U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris takes the stage during the Democratic National Convention at the United Center in Chicago Aug. 22, 2024. Harris said Sept. 21 she will not attend the 79th dinner of the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation in New York City Oct. 17. The Catholic charities fundraiser has become a staple for presidential nominees in election years. Former President Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, has not confirmed his attendance. (OSV News/Brendan Mcdermid, Reuters)



by OSV News

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Vice President Kamala Harris will not attend the Al Smith charity dinner Oct. 17, a New York Catholic charities fundraiser that has become a staple for presidential nominees in election years.

CNN reported Harris' decision Sept. 21, and The Associated Press later confirmed it. Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, reportedly plans to spend the time campaigning.

Harris and the Republican nominee, former President Donald Trump, were expected to share a multi-tiered dais with New York Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, the event's host, and other church, political, business and social luminaries at the 79th Dinner of the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation.

As OSV News reported Sept. 17, the event is already fully subscribed and will draw 1,500 generous guests to the grand ballroom of the New York Hilton Midtown. At $5,000 a plate, the soiree is expected to raise millions of dollars for charitable organizations associated with the Archdiocese of New York.

Trump has not confirmed his attendance.

The annual dinner is named for four-time New York Gov. Al Smith, who was the first Catholic presidential nominee for a major-party when chosen to run on the Democratic ticket in 1928.

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Catholic comedian Jim Gaffigan is serving as the event's master of ceremonies. He previously emceed the event in 2018. Gaffigan announced the honor in a Sept. 6 post to his X (formerly Twitter) account, which featured a copy of the formal dais invitation naming the featured speakers.

"I'm so honored to be MC-ing this year's Al Smith Memorial Dinner on October 17th. Too bad I don't recognize those two names in the middle of the invitation. Anyone ever heard of them?" Gaffigan posted, dryly referring to the two presidential candidates.

The annual event is always popular on the New York autumn social calendar, but in presidential election years, when the candidates are invited to speak at the dinner, it is a must-attend, see-and-be-seen event for many.

In 2023, centenarian statesman Henry A. Kissinger, in one of his last public appearances, held the rapt attention of 900 dinner guests as he delivered a compelling message of warning and hope.

According to a news release, the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation in 2023 awarded grants of $5 million to organizations dedicated to bringing hope to the poor, sick and underprivileged within the Archdiocese of New York regardless of race, creed or color. In 2024, the foundation will distribute a record $7.3 million raised in 2023.

One of the featured grantees is the Elizabeth Seton Children's Center in Yonkers, New York. It is the region's largest, specialty, long-term care center for children with complex medical needs and those who are ventilator-dependent. It is sponsored by the Sisters of Charity Ministry Network.

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. View the full series.