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Democratic presidential candidate and U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris gestures during the presidential debate with Republican presidential nominee and former U.S. President Donald Trump in Philadelphia Sept. 10. Harris will not attend the Oct. 17 Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner in New York, but she will send a prerecorded video message. (OSV News/Reuters/Brian Snyder)



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Vice President Kamala Harris will not be attending the 79th annual Al Smith charity dinner in person, opting instead to send a prerecorded video message, Joseph Zwilling, director of communications of the New York Archdiocese, confirmed to NCR.

The event, set for tonight (Oct. 17) at the New York Hilton Midtown in New York City, raises funds for Catholic charities supporting children's medical and financial needs.

Harris' [decision](#) marks the first time in nearly four decades that a major party presidential candidate has chosen not to attend the high-profile event. In 1984, Democratic nominee Walter Mondale skipped the dinner during his campaign against then-President Ronald Reagan. Former President Donald Trump [confirmed](#) his in-person participation on Sept. 23.

Traditionally, the Al Smith dinner brings together the two presidential candidates for a night of "nonpartisan" and "self-deprecatory" good humor, the New York Archdiocese [stated in a media advisory](#), while raising millions for charity. This year's edition will have comedian Jim Gaffigan [serving](#) as the dinner's emcee.

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[According to The Daily Caller](#), Mary Erdoes, vice chair of the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation's board of directors, explained that the organization had made significant efforts to secure Harris' attendance, but scheduling conflicts related to her campaign ultimately prevented her from being present.

"We exhausted every possible effort and connection we had to try to get her there, but to no avail," Erdoes told The Daily Caller.

New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, a prominent figure at the dinner, expressed disappointment over Harris' absence.

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"We were looking forward to giving the vice president an enthusiastic welcome," [said Dolan at a Sept. 23 press conference](#). "She speaks very much about high ideals and how it's good to get away from division and come together in unity and all."

The Al Smith charity dinner, named in honor of former New York Gov. Al Smith, who was the first Catholic to run for U.S. president, has been a significant event in American political life since 1945.

The Harris and Trump campaigns did not immediately respond to requests for comment regarding the vice president's decision.

**Related:** [Harris to skip Al Smith dinner, annual NY Catholic charity event and staple for presidential nominees](#)

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