

Commission on Presidential Debates Announces Sites, Dates, Formats and Candidate Selection Criteria for 2008 General Election

November 19, 2007

Paul G. Kirk, Jr. and Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr., co-chairmen of the non-partisan, non-profit Commission on Presidential Debates ("CPD" or "the Commission") today announced dates, sites and formats of three presidential and one vice presidential debates for the 2008 general election. The dates and sites are:

First presidential debate:

Friday, September 26

University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS

Vice presidential debate:

Thursday, October 2

Washington University in St. Louis, MO

Second presidential debate:

Tuesday, October 7

Belmont University, Nashville, TN

Third presidential debate:

Wednesday, October 15

Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY

The two backup sites are Centre College in Danville, KY and Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC.

The Commission also announced formats for the debates.

All debates will be ninety minutes in length and start at 9:00 p.m. ET.

Each debate will be administered by a single moderator.

The first presidential debate will focus on domestic policy; the third presidential debate will focus on foreign policy.

The second presidential (town meeting format) debate will include any issues raised by members of that audience, and the vice presidential debate will include domestic and foreign policy.

In each debate except the town meeting format, the candidates will be seated at a table with the moderator.

Kirk and Fahrenkopf introduced two format features different from CPD formats of the

past. The first change will be incorporated in the first and third presidential debates as well as the vice-presidential debate.

Each of those debates will be divided into 8 ten-minute issue segments; the moderator will introduce each segment with an issue on which each candidate will comment, after which the moderator will facilitate further discussion of the issue, including direct exchange between the candidates, for the balance of that segment. Time will be reserved for closing statements by each of the candidates in each debate.

Kirk and Fahrenkopf noted that this change is aimed at increasing the educational value of the general election debates. "Our mission is to promote voter education. The public deserves to hear and see the candidates offer and defend their positions on the critical issues facing our country in the most thoughtful and in-depth manner that television time constraints will allow. Loosening the constraints within the ninety minutes debate will allow for more serious examination of complicated questions. This change will also open the possibility of the moderator inviting candidates to question each other. We want voters to benefit from as full an explanation of a topic as possible, and we feel certain that the candidates will welcome this change for the same reason."

The second departure from past CPD formats will be the introduction of internet access to the presidential town meeting debate. Questions solicited by Internet will be included with those from citizens on the stage with the candidates.

Kirk and Fahrenkopf said: "The Commission believes that by including questions from Internet participants, we will enhance and expand the effectiveness of the town meeting debate. This technique has been employed in different ways during many of the primary debates. We will continue to learn from its use in the primary season, and we intend to consult with experts in information technology who can help us integrate it into a general election town meeting in a manner consistent with our non-partisan charter."

The Commission also released the 2008 Candidate Selection Criteria which will be used to determine who is invited to participate in the general election debates. In addition to being constitutionally eligible, candidates must appear on a sufficient number of state ballots to have a mathematical chance of winning a majority vote of the electoral college, and have 15% support in national polls before the debates.

The Gallup Organization will advise the CPD in the application of its criteria to polling data as it did in 2000 and 2004. View the 2008 Candidate Selection Criteria (<http://www.debates.org/pages/candsel2008.html>).

The co-chairmen noted that moderators for the four debates would be chosen in the summer of 2008.

The CPD was established in 1987 and sponsored all presidential and vice presidential debates in 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004.