

Decision2008

The Race for President of the United States

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Presidential Debate Project Welcomes NBC News/MSNBC as National Broadcast Partner

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PALM BEACH, Fla. – Leadership Florida, the Florida Press Association and the Florida Public Broadcasting Service today announced that they will team up with NBC News/MSNBC to produce two live debates featuring the major Republican and Democratic candidates for President. The debates will be broadcast on MSNBC on Jan. 23 and 25, 2008, to a nationwide audience.

Decision 2008: Before You Vote, a partnership of the three Florida organizations, said the debate series is expected to generate a large national television audience in the millions in what is shaping up to be a key week of the presidential primary season.

Gov. Charlie Crist and the Florida Legislature propelled Florida to the front of the electoral process by moving up the date of the Florida primary from early March to Jan. 29. As a result, Florida voters have a new, highly visible and critical role in the national race for president.

The first debate in the Decision 2008 project will occur on the evening of Jan. 23 – the day after the New Hampshire primary, and in advance of Jan. 29 primaries in Florida and South Carolina. The second debate will occur two days later on the evening of Jan. 25. One week after the Florida primary, voters in 24 states will go to the polls on Feb. 5, 2008 – the night that likely will determine the 2008 nominees to become the 44th president of the United States.

Letters of invitation have been sent to each of the major candidates for president and the Florida and national chairs of the Democratic and Republican parties. Organizers expect full participation, on account of Florida's pivotal importance as a swing state wielding 27 electoral votes and because of the critical timing of the state's primary election.

“The debates of **Decision 2008: Before You Vote** will provide every voter here in Florida – and now with NBC News/MSNBC's participation, voters across the United States – with the opportunity to learn more about the candidates and issues in these two primary contests,” said Jeff Bartel, chairman of Leadership Florida and vice president of external affairs for Florida Power & Light. “We're thrilled that all Americans now will have the opportunity to tune in to these spirited and substantive debates.”

Both debates will take place on the campus of a soon-to-be-named institution of higher education in



Florida. They will be broadcast LIVE on MSNBC. Additionally, most of the NBC affiliates in Florida have already committed to broadcast the debates live. The debates will also be streamed live on MSNBC.com and simulcast on public radio. Further information about the telecast of the debates, including start times, moderators and format will be announced at a later time.

“NBC News is pleased to join the **Decision 2008: Before You Vote** partnership, and we are looking forward to the opportunity to bring these debates from the key state of Florida to a national audience,” said Philip Alongi, executive producer of NBC News Special Events. “We’re thrilled to be working with such experienced partners on this important debate.”

Foy Maloy, chairman of the Florida Press Association and publisher of the Fernandina Beach News Leader, said the partnership promises to deliver Florida voters dynamic, fair and rigorous forums for the major candidates to present themselves and their policy prescriptions to Americans.

“These debates offer candidates the chance to prove their mettle,” Maloy said. “Florida’s newspapers are proud to be partnered in this important effort to give Americans the opportunity to evaluate those who seek to steer our ship of state.”

Indeed, Florida newspapers will devote substantial space to covering the races involved and, through the Florida Press Association, also will promote viewership of the live statewide debate series through the donation of prominent advertising space.

Sandy Cesaretti Ray, chairman of Florida Public Broadcasting Service, and also general manager of WSRE-TV, licensed to Pensacola Junior College, said she was confident that the critical timing of the debates would be the magnet to draw candidates to participate and viewers to watch and listen.

“These candidates know all too well how important Florida is in selecting the next occupant of the White House,” said Cesaretti Ray. “We are thrilled to be a partner in this important effort.”

The partnership in the **Decision 2008: Before You Vote** project demonstrates its deep reach, significance, balance and non-partisanship.

For 25 years, **Leadership Florida** has served to develop a community of leaders with diverse perspectives to address our state’s challenges and work for the common goal of a better Florida. The Florida **Press Association** is a nonprofit corporation designed to protect the freedoms and advance the professional standards of the press in Florida, with a membership that includes most of Florida’s daily and weekly newspapers. **Florida Public Broadcasting** is a non-profit network of 26 public television and radio stations dedicated to serving our local communities and who reach 99 percent of Florida’s population.

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