

Decision2008

The Race for President of the United States

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Presidential Debate Project: Florida Atlantic University will host debates to be nationally televised by MSNBC

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BOCA RATON, Fla. – Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton has been selected to host two live debates featuring the major Republican and Democratic candidates for President. The announcement was made today by **Decision 2008: Before You Vote**, a partnership that includes Leadership Florida, the Florida Press Association and the Florida Public Broadcasting Service Inc., which has joined with NBC News/MSNBC to produce the debates that will air LIVE on MSNBC on Jan. 23 and 25, 2008, before a nationwide audience.

“We at FAU are thrilled by the opportunity to host debates of such compelling national significance,” said FAU President Frank T. Brogan. “In addition to fulfilling our educational mission to inform Florida’s electorate, we look forward to also educating millions of others as we roll out the red carpet and welcome these presidential candidates – and the national spotlight that accompanies them – to our campus.”

Wendy Abberger, president of Leadership Florida, said the **Decision 2008: Before You Vote** debate series is expected to generate a national television audience in the millions in what is shaping up to be a key week in the presidential primary season. In addition, the partnership will produce two one-hour pre-debate specials on Florida Public Broadcasting TV and radio stations that will feature a panel of Florida journalists who will preview the contests.

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, 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.

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“Florida Atlantic University is a wonderful venue to host the nationally televised debates of **Decision 2008: Before You Vote**, which will provide voters here in Florida and across the United States with the opportunity to learn more about the candidates and issues in these two primary contests,” said Teala Milton, chair of Leadership Florida and chief public affairs officer for JEA. “We’re thrilled that all Americans will have the opportunity to tune in to these spirited and substantive debates.”

Both debates will take place on FAU’s campus in Boca Raton and will be broadcast LIVE on MSNBC and on Florida Public Television and Radio. Additionally, most of the NBC affiliates in Florida have expressed interest in broadcasting the debates live. The debate will also stream live at msnbc.com. Further information about the telecast of the debates, including times, moderators and format will be announced at a later date.

“NBC News is pleased to join with the **Decision 2008: Before You Vote** partnership 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 look forward to working with such experienced partners on this important debate.”

Marty Petty, chair of the Florida Press Association and publisher of the St. Petersburg Times, 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.

“Florida’s newspapers have a long and distinguished track record of providing our citizens the distinctive political coverage and forums necessary to ensure rich discourse and engagement in the democratic process. There has never been a more important time for the citizens of Florida or the country to participate. And the Florida Press Association is proud to help set the pace.”

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.

Jose A. Fajardo, chairman of Florida Public Broadcasting Service, and also president and general manager of WMFE in Orlando, said he was confident that the critical timing of the debates would be a 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,” Fajardo said. “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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