

ISSUES THAT MATTER FOR 2008 Presidential Debates

The League had a history of allowing third party candidates to participate in the debates. In 1980 the League invited Congressman John Anderson to join Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan in the debates.

Anderson was given a boost from the public debates. At one point the polls had him at 21%. He won 7% of the vote.

When Jesse Ventura ran for Governor in Minnesota he was polling at 10 percent in the polls before the debates. After ten statewide debates he rose to 38 percent and won a 3-way race.

The Commission on Presidential Debates took a different tack from the League of Women Voters.

This Commission/corporation has excluded Ross Perot, Ralph Nader and Pat Buchanan from the debates.

In 1996 Ross Perot was excluded from the debates. Even with all his money and after having won nearly 19 percent of the vote in 1992 it was determined that he did not have "a chance to win," despite the fact that he even led in the polls at one point in 1992.

Walter Cronkite called the presidential debates under the CPD an "unconscionable fraud" because the CPD format "defies meaningful discourse."

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In early years the CPD determined who could be in a debate by vague criteria including interviews with columnists, pollsters and consultants who determined whether a candidate could win.

In the year 2000, the CPD changed their criteria for third party and independent candidates -- a candidate now needed 15 percent or more support as measured by the average of five private polling organizations -- which just happen to be owned by several major newspaper and television conglomerates.

In 2000, Ralph Nader was excluded from the debates because the parent corporations that conduct these polls were giving him scant attention.

Without the mainstream media attention there is no moving up, and without moving up, candidates like Nader do not get into the debates and reach tens of millions of people.

In 2000, a Fox poll revealed that 64% of likely voters wanted to see 'other candidates' including Ralph Nader in the debates.

Other polls in 2004 showed similar results.

But it didn't happen, thanks to the Commission on Presidential Debates.

Independents voices and third party candidates, including the Abolitionist, Women's Suffrage Movement, Worker

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Protection, and Farmer Populace Party, have brought about many of the major changes in this country.

When Abraham Lincoln ran for office, the two major parties were the Whigs and the Democrats.

As a Republican, Lincoln was elected as a third party candidate -- even after being left off the ballot in the 11 states that seceded from the Union.

In 2004, 17 national civic leaders from the left, center and right of political spectrum - including Paul Weyrich, Chellie Pingree of Common Cause, Alan Keyes, Tom Gerety of the Brennan Center for Justice, Bay Buchanan, Randall Robinson, former FEC General Counsel Larry Noble, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, and Jehmu Green of Rock the Vote - created the Citizens' Debate Commission.

Bolstered by an advisory board comprised of 60 diverse civic groups, the Citizens' Debate Commission goal is to sponsor presidential debates that serves the American people, not political parties, first.

References:

- Open Debates, on the Web at: <http://www.opendebates.org/theissue>
- No Debate by George Farah, on the Web at: <http://www.sevenstories.com/Book/index.cfm?GCOI=58322100234970>

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Nader/Gonzalez supports the opening up of the Presidential debates.

Right now, they are limited to the candidates from the two corporate parties.

The debates are controlled by the so-called Commission on Presidential Debates, a private corporation which was created by the Democratic and Republican Parties in 1987.

The Commission is headed by Frank Fahrenkopf -- the former head of the Republican National Committee, and Paul Kirk -- the former head of Democratic National Committee.

Fahrenkopf is a lobbyist for gambling interests, Kirk for pharmaceutical companies.

Debate sponsors have included Anheuser-Busch, Phillip Morris, Ford Motor Co., Yahoo Inc., 3Com, among other companies who gave soft money to the two parties' national committees.

In 2000, some in the press dubbed the debates as the "Anheuser-Bush-Gore" debates.

In a memo by the CPD, the avowed goal for forming the commission was to "strengthen the two parties."

In 1988, the Commission seized control of the debates from the League of Women Voters.