

News from the...
DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEES

Release: Wednesday, February 18, 1987

Contact: Robert P. Schmermund, RNC
202/863-8550

Terry Michael, DNC
202/863-8020

RNC AND DNC ESTABLISH
COMMISSION ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

WASHINGTON, D.C.--Republican National Committee Chairman Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr. and Democratic National Committee Chairman Paul G. Kirk, Jr. announced the creation of the Commission on Presidential Debates at a joint press conference today at the Capitol.

The 10-member commission is a bipartisan, non-profit, tax exempt organization formed to implement joint sponsorship of general election presidential and vice presidential debates, starting in 1988, by the national Republican and Democratic committees between their respective nominees.

In launching this new initiative, the two party chairmen said, "A major responsibility of both the Democratic and Republican parties is to inform the American electorate on their philosophies and policies as well as those of their respective candidates. One of the most effective ways of accomplishing this is through debates between their nominees. By jointly sponsoring these debates, we will better fulfill our party responsibilities to inform and educate the electorate, strengthen the role of political parties in the electoral process and, most important of all, we can institutionalize the debates, making them an integral and permanent part of the presidential process."

In emphasizing the bipartisan nature of the commission, both chairmen noted the contributions to the debate process by the League of Women Voters: "We applaud the League for laying a foundation from which we can assume our own responsibilities. While the two party committees will be sponsors for all future presidential general election debates between our party nominees, we would expect and encourage the League's participation in sponsoring other debates, particularly in the presidential primary process."

Kirk and Fahrenkopf, in stressing the need to institutionalize the debates, said it will be the Commission's goal to recommend the number of presidential and vice presidential debates, as well as the dates and locations of those debates, before the 1988 nominating conventions. Potential candidates for the parties' respective nominations have committed to support party-sponsored debates. The Commission's recommendations will be forwarded to all potential candidates for concurrence as soon as they are completed.

more.

BLD

"This degree of certainty about the debates going into the general election," the chairmen said, "is an historic breakthrough in institutionalizing them. It means that we won't spend most of the general election campaign debating about debates, as we have too often in the past. The American people have an expectation that debates will occur every four years; this process is designed to assure that that expectation will be realized."

Fahrenkopf and Kirk will serve as co-chairs of the new Commission. They appointed as vice chairs:

- Richard Moe, Washington lawyer and partner in the firm of Davis, Polk & Wardwell;
- David Norcross, Washington lawyer and partner in the firm of Myers, Matteo, Rabil, Pluese & Norcross.

Others named to the Commission are:

- U.S. Rep. Barbara Vucanovich (R-NV);
- former U.S. Senator John Culver (D-IA), now a partner in the Washington law firm of Arent, Fox, Kintner, Plotkin & Kahn;
- Republican Gov. Kay Orr of Nebraska;
- Vernon Jordan, a Democrat, former president of the Urban League, now a partner in the law firm of Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld;
- Pamela Harriman, chairman of Democrats for the '80's;
- U.S. Senator Pete Wilson (R-CA).

The two chairmen said the Commission will hire staff and open a Washington office shortly. They said articles of incorporation for the Commission have been filed in the District of Columbia as well as an application for tax exemption with the Internal Revenue Service.

Kirk and Fahrenkopf concluded by saying, "We have no doubt that with the help of the Commission we can forge a permanent framework in which all future presidential debates between the nominees of the two political parties will be based. It is our responsibility as party chairmen to have an informative and fair presidential process. The establishment of the Commission on Presidential Debates will go a long way toward achieving that goal."

Today's announcement stems from a recommendation of the Commission on National Elections, which during 1985 studied the presidential election system. On Nov. 26, 1985, Kirk and Fahrenkopf signed a joint memorandum agreeing in principle to pursue the party sponsorship concept.