



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 4, 2011

Stage Set for First GOP Presidential-Contender Debate

On Wednesday morning, the final lineup was announced for the GOP presidential contender debate, set to take place in South Carolina on Thursday. It will include former Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, Texas Representative Ron Paul (left), former Godfather's Pizza CEO Herman Cain, former New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson, and former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum.



According to the *New York Times*, that roster is in stark contrast to that of the first Republican debate of the 2008 election cycle, which included a number of top-tier candidates: Representative Duncan Hunter of California, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, former Virginia Governor Jim Gilmore, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, Kansas Senator Sam Brownback, Texas Representative Ron Paul, Representative Tom Tancredo of Colorado, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson, and Arizona Senator John McCain.

The *Huffington Post* [notes](#) of the roster, The presence of both Paul and Johnson who each have strong libertarian leanings on such a small stage guarantees that much of the rhetoric on foreign policy will be more isolationist than is normal for a Republican forum.

Pawlenty reportedly commented on the absence of so-called big name rivals from the upcoming debate on a radio show in Iowa yesterday. Seemingly targeting Mitt Romney, Pawlenty remarked that others in consideration of a presidential ticket should get off the sidelines:

You know, its May and I can understand if people didnt want to start in December or January. I mean, in the past theyve said, "Thats too early." Well, you know, its time. [The primary campaign] needs to start now.

An adviser to Mitt Romney had stated on Monday that the former Massachusetts Governor will be skipping the debate on Thursday because its still early, the field is too unsettled and he's not yet an announced candidate.

CNN explains:

Romney has formed an exploratory committee, one of the criteria required to participate in the debate as determined by its sponsors But Romney has been carefully maintaining a low profile in hopes of avoiding criticism from rivals.

Meanwhile, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, former Governors Mike Huckabee and Sarah Palin, and Minnesota Representative Michele Bachmann have all failed to meet the criteria for the debate, as they have not yet formed the necessary exploratory committees. Bachmann asserts she will likely form such a committee in June.

Likewise, former Louisiana Governor Buddy Roemer was originally expected to be included in the debate, but failed to meet Fox News requirement of acquiring at least 1 percent in the five most recent national polls.

Michael Clemente, senior vice president of news for Fox News, explains:



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Our job is not to marshal the field but to ask the tough questions of those who do get in the race. This is the first of our five debates, and I'm sure we'll be able to kick-start the conversation about who will be the next president of the United States.

The *L.A. Times* [reports](#):

Fox News laid out strict criteria to qualify for the debate, including requiring candidates to register exploratory committees or to have announced a formal presidential campaign, to file all necessary paperwork with the Federal Election Commission and pay all federal and South Carolina filing fees.

That amounts to \$25,000 per candidate in South Carolina, due to the party by 5 p.m. Tuesday. It's unclear who, if anyone, has yet paid. Party spokesman Joel Sawyer declined to say, adding that the information would be released Wednesday.

Santorum officially [registered](#) his presidential exploratory committee with the Federal Election Commission just yesterday, allowing him to participate in the debate on Thursday. He made the announcement on Sean Hannity's radio show on Tuesday afternoon, indicating that while he is not definitely running for the position, he feels like I'm being called to do this.

Santorum, too, commented on the absence of prominent GOP contenders from the trail leading to a presidential bid. I'm getting a lot of feedback from folks that they want to see the candidates more, they want to kick the tires a bit, he said. Santorum, who has visited New Hampshire 15 times and Iowa 14 times, adds, I won't say I'm lonely, but there aren't a lot of people spending a lot of time out there on the hustings at this point.

Other potential contenders for the GOP presidential bid include former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, businessman Donald Trump, and former Ambassador to China and Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, the latter of whom has already formed a political action committee.

South Carolina Republican Party Chairman Karen Floyd remarks of those who are participating in Thursday's debate,

We give great credit to all of these candidates for being willing to stand before a national audience and lay out their plans and ideas for the future of this country. We are looking forward to a great debate among these presidential hopefuls.

South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley has offered some advice to the GOP presidential contenders who hope to win the South Carolina primary: There is a group that has come through South Carolina. They are trying to tell me how they are going to win. I don't care how they are going to win. I want to know how they are going to fix our country.

The debate was originally set to take place on Monday, but the absence of declared GOP candidates forced it to be rescheduled. It is now set to air live on Thursday at 9 p.m. EDT on Fox News.



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