



**Statement on Presidential Debate Site Selection  
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New Orleans is the clear moral choice for a 2008 presidential debate. Unfortunately, it appears that politics has trumped in the site selection process carried out by the Commission on Presidential Debates.

According to Commission Board co-chair Paul Kirk, the city was rejected because it was not ready to host such an event. That is clearly untrue. New Orleans met or exceeded every criterion that the Commission set forth in its application process – in logistics, finance and educational partners.

- A recovering New Orleans hosts major events with great frequency – and we do it well. The NBA and the NCAA clearly agree, since both the national collegiate football championship and the NBA All-Star game are slated for the city in 2008. Mardi Gras and Jazzfest draw more than a million visitors to New Orleans; hundreds of thousands of convention-goers attend professional meetings in the city each year. Any idea that the city is not ready to host a presidential debate is simply not true. During a visit months ago, CPD staffer Marty Slutsky said that “the city can do this tomorrow.”
- The Morial Convention Center is an unparalleled venue, with state-of-the-art facilities, technology and services.
- The Women of the Storm grassroots group is a strong and effective sponsor.
- Our partnership with four diverse universities – Dillard, Loyola, Tulane and Xavier – extended the educational outreach of the Commission to more than 20,000 students, including two historically black colleges and universities. The Commission has never chosen an HBCU for a debate site and unfortunately, they did not take advantage of the opportunity we presented.

Since its processes are not in the public eye, it is difficult to determine how the Commission weighed criteria in its decision-making to select Hofstra (New York), Belmont (Nashville), Washington University (St. Louis, for the fourth time), and the University of Mississippi (Oxford, a city of less than 15,000 more than 300 miles from the storm-damaged Gulf Coast). We encourage introducing transparency to the selection process, to assure that all applicants are treated fairly.. We hope the vote of the Commission will be released; we had many indications of support for a New Orleans debate from several members of the Commission’s board..

New Orleans is also the correct choice for American voters. While Women of the Storm congratulate those sites that were selected, we maintain that our city is the perfect backdrop for those individuals vying for the highest office of the land to discuss and debate domestic issues which affect the entire nation – crisis response, disaster recovery, education, health care, housing, and a deteriorating infrastructure. Those issues will persist for New Orleans and America throughout the next administration – and beyond.

We're thrilled with and grateful for the support we have received from across the nation – editorially and in the news columns, beginning with our own *Times-Picayune* and including such national outlets as *The New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *the Washington Times*, *USA Today*, *The Boston Globe* and especially *TIME Magazine*.

Seven presidential candidates supported our application for a debate – Joe Biden, Sam Brownback, Hillary Clinton, Chris Dodd, John Edwards, John McCain, Barack Obama. Thousands of everyday Americans also expressed their strong desire to see a New Orleans debate. Endorsements of New Orleans came from every sector of society. We thank those who spoke out on our behalf – what a tribute this has been to our historic city devastated by the forces of Katrina!

In this season of thanksgiving, we offer our gratitude to the members of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress – 57 Senators and 132 Representatives – who have made the trip to see our devastation and our progress. We appreciate the recent actions by Congress and the President offering necessary resources to rebuild our city. We are deeply disappointed that the Commission on Presidential Debates and its board chose to follow a different path. We urge the Commission's board members to come see New Orleans for themselves, just as so many members of Congress and the President have done.

However, we look forward to continuing our push toward recovery. We will work to keep New Orleans in the national spotlight. We invite all Presidential candidates– and the media who cover them – to visit our city, discuss important domestic issues in our venues, and keep New Orleans as a focus in the Presidential election, for the lessons it holds for all American citizens.