

WBA drops plans for Dem gov, GOP U.S. Senate primary debates amid outcry over criteria

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The WBA Foundation has withdrawn its offer to host debates featuring Dem gov hopefuls and GOP contenders for the U.S. Senate following an outcry over its decision to limit both to four candidates.

The decision comes after the foundation faced backlash from Dem gov candidates and groups, among others, over the proposed criteria as well as limiting the field to four for the planned July 27 debate considering there are 10 people in the field. The GOP primary debate had been planned for July 21.

The original criteria included using the Marquette University Law School Poll to winnow the field, prompting survey director Charles Franklin to protest over using the survey. The WBA Foundation also wanted to candidates to raise at least \$250,000 by the most recent reporting period before the debates to be eligible for consideration.

The group said Thursday it will instead focus on general election debates.

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“There is a lot of interest in these primary elections, which is why we initially made an attempt to hold these debates,” said WBA President and CEO Michelle Vetterkind. “By withdrawing the offer for primary debates, others can now pursue candidate forums in their respective primaries.”

The campaigns for several Dem gov candidates said they were disappointed by the foundation’s decision.

Matt Flynn campaign manager Bryan Kennedy said a debate is needed for voters to learn about the Dem candidates and how they'll "stop Foxconn, fund vital services and clean up our drinking water." Dana Wachs spokeswoman Olivia Hwang said every voter should have the opportunity to hear from the candidates, while Paul Soglin campaign manager Melissa Mulliken suggested a "fair solution" would have instead been two debates featuring five candidates drawn at random.

Kelda Roys' campaign spokesman Brian Evans said he hopes "another organization will step forward and host a debate in this primary."

A coalition of media organizations, including WisPolitics.com, is working on a Dem gov candidate debate planned for July 12 in Milwaukee.