



June 11, 2015

Mr. Reince Priebus, Chairman
Republican National Committee
310 First Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Chairman Priebus,

I write you today regarding the presidential primary debate rules Fox News and CNN recently announced. First of all, I am thankful to you and the RNC for the leadership shown in bringing some order to the debate process. Additionally, I appreciate the challenges that a large field of candidates poses to networks.

However, I am troubled by the nationalization of the presidential primary process brought on by the decision to use national polls to determine which candidate is on what debate stage. This decision has a negative impact on the traditional role of Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina. I understand the position in which the RNC finds itself, but strongly believe the RNC has a responsibility to ensure these debates are open to all candidates in an equal manner, thereby protecting the early state primary and caucus system.

The Republican Party does not choose its nominee in a single, national contest. If it did, the criteria of using a national poll to determine debate eligibility would make sense. Our party has a tried and true system of early state caucuses and primaries, which allow voters the opportunity to personally interact with the candidates, see them in small group settings and make informed decisions without the filter of the media. The early state process prevents money and celebrity from being the determining factor in the presidential contest. It gives candidates the opportunity to gain traction through grassroots campaigning and direct interaction with voters. A reliance on national polling steals the traditional role of the early primary states.

The primary process is not a national election and never has anyone considered national polling to be relevant in a primary effort. National polls are not a useful tool for determining the outcome of a primary contest. In August 2007, Rudy Giuliani and Fred Thompson led the Republican field in the national Real Clear Politics average. In August 2011, Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum were in the bottom three of the RCP national average. These two examples are stark contrasts to how the eventual primary process played out. A reliance on national polling takes the decision making power away from our early state voters and puts it squarely on an unreliable predictor of the process.

By getting involved in the debate process, the RNC sought to bring order to a system that got out of control during the 2012 cycle. It was a laudable goal and everyone welcomed the leadership. However, given its involvement in the process, the RNC must lead in all aspects of the debate process. The RNC must not simply cede leadership regarding the rules governing the debates.

RNC staff and members have consistently said that the Committee has no standing to mandate individual candidates' inclusion or exclusion. However, the RNC has also repeatedly said that anyone who participates in a non-sanctioned debate will not be included in future sanctioned debates. The RNC cannot have influence one way but not the other.

The fact is, the RNC continues to have influence over the media networks and could easily pull its backing from any network sponsored debate if the network does not give all the candidates for president an opportunity to participate on an equal footing. By refusing to publicly speak out against the media imposed restrictions, the RNC is placing exorbitant influence over our primary process into the hands of media executives instead of the voters of Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and the other early primary states. Yesterday, 56 leaders from New Hampshire shared their concerns about how this process impacts their state. I agree with their sentiments.

The only fair solution to the current proposed rules is for each network to hold consecutive debates, dividing the field via some sort of random draw. This solution would provide each candidate for president the opportunity to present his case to the Republican primary electorate. Our party has a long held tradition and rule of not picking winners and losers in our primary process without a vote of the full committee. By sanctioning debates that exclude candidates for president or treat candidates differently based on national polling, the RNC is not fulfilling the spirit of its own rules.

In closing, I ask you to consider your own words from January. "This schedule ensures we will have a robust discussion among our candidates while also allowing the candidates to focus their time engaging with Republican voters. It is exciting that Republicans will have such a large bench of candidates to choose from, and the sanctioned debate process ensures voters will have a chance to hear from them." The proposed rules from Fox News and CNN do not ensure voters the chance to hear from all candidates on an equal playing field and therefore violate the very spirit the RNC has sought to impose on the debate process. I welcome the opportunity to work with you and the RNC to find a solution that is equitable and protects the traditional role of the early primary states.

Sincerely,

Christian Ferry
Campaign Manager
Lindsey Graham 2016