

A PLACE IN HISTORY

Good for Clark College in bid to co-sponsor a 2008 presidential or VP debate

If one of the 2008 presidential or vice presidential debates is in Portland next fall, Clark College rightly will have a place in the spotlight that shines on these history-altering events.

Go to www.debates.org and then click on "CPD Announces 2008 Debate Host Applicants." A list of 16 would-be sponsors and sites appears, including this joint-sponsorship entry: "Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission (MERC), Portland, OR, and Clark College, Vancouver, WA."

The bipartisan federal Commission on Presidential Debates is well along on its process for selecting sites and sponsors for the 2008 nationally televised face-offs, which can catapult or capsize a candidate's chances.

With 16 applicants and four debates (three presidential, one vice presidential), Clark College President Bob Knight isn't deluding himself. He knows the odds of any given site being picked are only about one in four. But he likes the chances that the MERC-Clark application will be a winner, and his enthusiasm is contagious because his reasons make sense.

But whether the commission picks MERC-Clark or not when it meets next month, the school and its backers in this bid are to be congratulated for their effort. Colleges should be supporters of public discourse on the issues of our time, be they huge universities or community colleges.

Actually, Clark's odds might be slightly better than one in four. Knight has heard through the grapevine that two of the 16 original applicants have dropped out.

If the MERC-Clark application wins a debate slot, the event will be at the Oregon Convention

Center in Portland. As Knight and Clark boosters envision it, ancillary events, such as public forums, would be at Clark in the days leading up to a debate. Further, Clark students would have a shot at getting tickets to attend the event or landing jobs as volunteers at it, Knight believes.

The Commission on Presidential Debates has visited the potential sites and is sifting through the applications.

It will announce the winners on either Oct. 15 or Oct. 22. Knight likes Clark's chances for three reasons, all of which sound good to us:

First, there has never been a presidential or vice presidential debate in the Pacific Northwest.

Second, the commission often picks college campuses for the face-offs. (2004: University of Massachusetts; Wake Forest University in North Carolina; Washington University in St. Louis,

and Centre College in Danville, Ky.) But there are about 1,200 community colleges nationwide and this would be a golden opportunity to represent them.

Third, even though Clark's role would be peripheral to Oregon's, and debate-night attention would be focused on the candidates and the Oregon Convention Center, Knight figures the MERC-Clark application will appeal to the commission because it nevertheless involves two states. In fact, that bistate angle and the chance to involve a community college are the reasons MERC contacted Clark months ago and invited the Vancouver school to join it in applying to be a debate sponsor.

"We know it's a long shot," Knight said Monday. "But if we don't get it, maybe we'll be ready to try four years later."

*Clark College
makes a good
case for a
role in 2008
presidential
debate.*
