



NEWS RELEASE

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ELEC Seeks Sponsors for Primary Debates

Chairman Thomas H. Prol, chairman of the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC), announced today that the Commission is seeking sponsors for debates involving gubernatorial primary candidates.

“The gubernatorial debates are an important part of ELEC’s efforts to educate voters and to encourage meaningful and informative dialogue on issues that affect the lives of all New Jersey residents,” Prol said.

“ELEC encourages the submission of applications to sponsor these debates, which broaden access to information and help encourage engagement and robust voter participation in the upcoming primary and general elections,” he added.

Potential sponsors must submit to ELEC a completed copy of “Application to Sponsor Gubernatorial Election Debate(s)” (Form DS). It is available at: www.elec.nj.gov/publicinformation/gub_man_forms.htm.

The form is used to obtain information such as whether the sponsor has overseen previous debates, will rebroadcast debates, will withhold any candidate endorsements until all debates air, will broadcast the debate in a foreign language, and will use a facility that accommodates persons with physical disabilities.

Forms must be submitted no later than March 17, 2025. The bipartisan Commission is meeting April 8, 2025 to select sponsors.

ELEC’s role in gubernatorial debates is limited to picking sponsors, ensuring they meet the requirements of the law, and resolving any differences that may arise between the sponsors.

By statute, the earliest a primary debate can be held this year is April 10, 2025. The latest date is May 30, 2025. The primary election is set for June 10, 2025.

Participation in two primary election debates is required as a condition of each candidate’s receipt of public matching funds.

Participation also is possible for candidates who are not participating in the public financing program, but who have raised and spent the applicable threshold amount (\$580,000 in 2025) and completed required documentation.

The first ELEC-sanctioned debates were held in 1989 at Rutgers University.

Since that year, 37 gubernatorial debates have been held by ELEC-designated sponsors. The total includes 19 primary election debates and 22 general election debates. Four general election debates have featured candidates for lieutenant governor since 2009.

In 2021, there was a single Republican primary debate hosted by 101.5 (WKXW-FM) on May 25, 2021. A planned second debate was cancelled when one candidate refused to take part. There was no Democratic primary debate in 2021 because only one candidate- Governor Phil Murphy – sought public funds.

Since their inception, the debates have provided a forum for 115 candidates representing the two major parties along with independent candidates who qualified for public funds.

New Jersey in 1973 was the first state in the nation to provide public financing of gubernatorial campaigns. In 1989, it became the first state to require publicly financed gubernatorial candidates to participate in primary and general election debates.

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