

TO: Incumbent Assemblyman James Oscarson
FROM: Chuck Muth, Dennis Hof
DATE: March 19, 2018

We are in receipt of your proposal for a televised debate on KPVM Channel 46 in Pahrump on April 11, 2018. And while I'm happy that you have agreed to debate me this time after ducking debates in our last Assembly District 36 campaign, the terms of your proposal need some work.

Let's start with two non-negotiable items...

A.) I'm confused as to why a public television station would charge for airtime to broadcast a program of such important community interest in the political arena.

That said, should there be any cost involved it must be covered by all of the campaigns that participate, not just yours. Otherwise it appears to be nothing more than a "Committee to Re-elect James Oscarson" campaign event.

Indeed, the intricate details of the debate format outlined in your proposal lead me to suspect that you and the station have already colluded on this program with no involvement or input from us or anyone else outside of your campaign.

B.) You and the station have determined that "Each candidate will stand at their own podium" for the one-hour duration of the debate.

Due to the fact that I'm still recovering from knee surgery I'm not physically able to participate under such a format at this time. But since standing in the Legislature is not a requirement of the job – as legislators spend most of the time sitting in chairs except for the rare occasion when they briefly rise to make a floor statement – finding an alternative format is perfectly appropriate.

Now on to the remainder of your proposal...

You have proposed a single televised debate two full months before Election Day to be moderated by news anchor Deanna O'Donnell with absolutely no public participation whatsoever, either as an audience witnessing the program in person or even in the development of the questions. Instead you have proposed that a media operation have complete and total control of the content.

For a variety of reasons, including the fact that our district encompasses communities well outside the broadcast scope of this Pahrump-based station, this does not serve the public interest of the District 36 electorate. As such, our counter-proposal is as follows:

1.) A SERIES of public debates and/or forums – in addition to one on KPVM under different terms – that will include, at the very least, the communities of Beatty, Moapa Valley and the section of Las Vegas that falls within the district, as well as two additional such public debates/forums in Pahrump.

I also propose at least two one-hour radio debates hosted by conservative talk-show hosts Kevin Wall of KBET 790 AM and Alan Stock of KXNT 840 AM. Although both programs are based out of Las Vegas, both also reach into the full geographic area of District 36. Other similar programs can and should also be considered.

Considering the fact that there were 12 presidential debates and 9 forums in the 2016 Republican presidential debate primary, such a schedule of multiple debates in this particular campaign is both reasonable and appropriate.

2.) The opinion of the vast majority of Republicans is that reporters and anchors of news shows should report on candidate debates not be participants in them. This is of special concern after witnessing the clear bias, if not open hostility, exhibited by certain media personalities in moderating presidential debates in 2016.

And while it would be perfectly acceptable for Ms. O'Donnell to join other media figures in posing questions at an open press conference, it is problematic to have her serve as the sole moderator of a televised debate where “All questions will come from her, with no input from the campaigns, or the public.”

As a campaign is about the candidates running for office and the voting public that must decide which candidate would best represent their interests in Carson City, to have a

member of the media completely control the nature of the discussion with no input from the involved parties or the public does not serve the public interest.

3.) In addition, we're talking about a debate in a Republican primary election, not a general election.

As every Republican voter knows, the issues of interest and concern involved in a GOP primary election are often quite different from those in a general election. And frankly, many members of the media are either not well informed on the intricacies of such issues and/or are actually hostile to the conservative agenda and frame questions designed to cause harm to conservatives.

I'm not suggesting that these very real and legitimate concerns apply to Ms. O'Donnell; however, it is our belief that your proposed debate should be moderated by a politically neutral party who nevertheless thoroughly understands conservative issues.

We are open to other suggestions, but would argue that a more appropriate moderator would be John Tsarpalas, president of the Nevada Policy Research Institute.

NPRI is a highly-respected conservative think-tank that deeply understands conservative issues but does not lobby for or against specific legislation or endorse candidates in races. As a well-informed neutral party not affiliated in any way with the media or campaigns, he would be a more suitable moderator should he agree to do so.

4.) In debate after debate voters have become increasingly frustrated by the tightly scripted time limits for discussions of important and complicated issues. It is literally impossible, for example, to fully discuss our state's bloated \$11.5 billion budget and the taxes you've raised to fund it in, as you propose, 90 seconds.

While a debate should certainly not devolve into one of those talking-head "shouting matches" we so often see on CNN - where the participants talk over one another to the point that no one can understand anything being said - a more open format allowing for more detailed answers, without filibustering, as well as greater back and forth interaction between the candidates who are seeking the public's vote would better serve the public's interest.

As such, we counter-propose that the moderator guide an open discussion, not put it in a straight-jacket.

5.) The purpose of a debate is to inform the public. As such we question the rationale of prohibiting the candidates from using electronic equipment during the discussion.

This is the 21st century. If a candidate can more fully inform the public on important issues and questions by quickly accessing information via an electronic device, such as a cell phone or laptop computer, that better serves the public interest.

Therefore, we counter-propose that there be no ban on the candidates from the opportunity to avail themselves, at their discretion, to the use of electronic equipment – or any other resources they may choose to bring with them - during the debate.

6.) Your debate invitation was extended to Joseph Bradley, a third Republican who has filed for this race. That raises a thorny issue.

As you know, other debates regularly establish a threshold of criteria candidates must meet to be considered viable and justified for inclusion.

The reason for this is the limited amount of time available in a short, one-hour debate. Time taken up by a candidate unable or unwilling to demonstrate competitiveness in the race denies the voting public time better used by candidates with a realistic chance of winning and representing them in office.

While I mean no disparagement of Mr. Bradley as an individual, the reality is that he's demonstrated no significant, identifiable base of support or shown any indication – short of a brief tweet announcing his candidacy last October and paying the filing fee last week – that he is a serious, viable candidate for this seat.

If you insist on one and only one one-hour debate, we don't believe it serves the voting public's best interest to include him and take time from the two candidates who have a reasonable chance for election and have been actively campaigning for this seat for months.

However, should you agree to our proposed series of multiple debates in various formats and venues, then I would certainly agree to include him in each and every one of them.

If you can address these issues, other minor concerns will be simple to resolve. Please respond to these concerns and counter-proposals in a timely fashion so that we may move forward with providing the Republican voters of District 36 the information they need and deserve to make a fully informed decision on June 12th as to who they want representing them in the Nevada Legislature.