

# Political news and notes

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## **DEBATING: Panel proposes 3 meetings this fall**

Republican Sen. John McCain and Democrat Sen. Barack Obama would sit at a table for two of three presidential debates this fall, which -- perhaps unintentionally -- would neutralize Obama's height advantage.

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The Commission on Presidential Debates proposed last week the less formal, more conversational talk-show format for two of three 90-minute debates it's seeking this fall. The third debate would be a town hall-style session in which the candidates would be free to walk around the stage.

The presumptive nominees haven't yet responded to the commission's proposal.

Obama is about 6-foot-1; McCain is 5-foot-9.

The proposed debates are:

- Sept. 26 at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Miss.
- Oct. 7 at Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn., the town hall session.
- Oct. 15 at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y.

The proposed vice presidential debate:

- Oct. 2 at Washington University in St. Louis.

## **CAMPAIGN STRATEGY: Can they hold onto states?**

Strategists for the presidential hopefuls laid out competing scenarios last week for how their candidates could win in November.

The strategies hinge largely on whether Democrat Barack Obama can keep all 20 states that Democrat John Kerry won in 2004 -- Hawaii and the West Coast, the upper Midwest, the Northeast and mid-Atlantic -- while picking up a couple of states President George W. Bush won that year.

Republican John McCain's challenge is whether he can hold an edge with independents and convert enough Democrats who don't support Obama to make up for the shrinking number of Republicans this year, his strategists said.

Of the states Kerry won in 2004, Obama campaign manager David Plouffe said the closest this year may be Michigan, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire.

### **Obama plans overseas trip**

Barack Obama said Saturday that he will travel to the Middle East and western Europe to meet with allies and discuss terrorism, nuclear weapons and global warming.

The trip, to take place this summer, is expected to provide the freshman Illinois senator an opportunity for face time with some of the world leaders he would be working with if elected in November. It also would give the opponent of the Iraq war a chance to strengthen his foreign-policy credentials, which John McCain, a veteran senator, Vietnam war hero and supporter of the Iraq war, has criticized as insufficient.

Obama said he will stop in Israel, Jordan, France, Germany and Britain. He also plans to travel to Iraq and Afghanistan this year, but as part of a congressional delegation.

### **FEMALE VOTE: No easy road for hopefuls**

Debbie Walsh, director of Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics, said neither candidate should take the women's vote for granted, and both are going to have to work for it.

For Obama, the older and working-class women who showed up for New York Sen. Hillary Clinton are dependable voters who will return in November -- a lot more trustworthy at the polls than the youngsters who helped launch his candidacy.

For McCain, he must look to married women who traditionally vote Republican and independents, she said. And women, who generally are vulnerable in economic downturns, will want to hear from both, primarily on pocketbook issues, she said.

### **EVANGELICAL VOTE: Making religious connections**

If Christian conservatives stay on the sidelines in the fall campaign, presidential hopeful John McCain probably stays in the Senate.

Christian conservatives provided much of the on-the-ground activity for President George W. Bush's 2004 re-election in swing states.

Without them, the lower-profile McCain campaign is likely to struggle to replicate Bush's success.

McCain's senior say their internal polling data suggest he has the support of three-quarters of white evangelical voters in swing states.

Obama dispatched former 9/11 Commission member Tim Roemer to meet with fellow Catholics. He sent Brian McLaren, one of the country's most influential pastors, to meet with fellow evangelicals.

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