

CNN/WMUR/Union Leader to host first presidential debates

The Situation Room

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CNN's Wolf Blitzer interviews CNN political analyst and Democratic strategist Donna Brazile and CNN contributor Bill Bennett, host of the radio program "Morning in America."

BLITZER: Let's get into real politics right now, presidential politics, 2008 presidential politics.

We are going to be co-sponsoring, co-hosting this first Democratic and the first Republican presidential debate of the season on April 4, April 5, up in New Hampshire.

The clock keeps moving up earlier and earlier. Are you surprised?

BRAZILE: No, I'm not.

And this is a great opportunity for the people of New Hampshire to get a look at these candidates. Look, we have some hot rock stars at the moment, but we also have some good, credible candidates who have not had the type of attention and exposure that they need in order to become top-tier candidates. So, this will give them the opportunity on both the Republican and Democratic side to see what I believe are some seasoned presidential candidates.

BLITZER: How important -- and I'm going to ask the same question on the Republican side to Bill -- but how important, on the Democratic side, are the -- is the need for these Democratic presidential hopefuls to show up at an early debate like this?

BRAZILE: Look, I hope they are booking their ticket right now, because this is going to be a very important debate.

New Hampshire is the first primary in the country. These voters will decide, ultimately, what candidate best represent not just their values, but the values of the American people. So, I'm hoping that they prepare themselves to get ready and get up to New Hampshire.

BLITZER: What do you think, because it's a risky thing for some of these candidates...

BENNETT: Oh, they...

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: ... to actually get into a debate with some really smart and articulate opponents?

BENNETT: It's moving up. They got to be there. They are having these private meetings. The public meetings should match the private meetings, it seems to me, in terms of commitments and positions.

You locution about these things keep moving up, it's like when the White House says, mistakes were made. Who is moving this up? Who is co-sponsoring this debate? Fine with me. But, I mean, I think...

BRAZILE: Fine with me.

BENNETT: ... the sooner we find out -- this is a -- this is the most interesting and exciting presidential campaign, and consequential, that we have seen in a very long time. Get them up there.

BLITZER: Because, usually, there is a president, a former president...

BENNETT: Yes.

BLITZER: ... or a vice president...

BRAZILE: Wide open.

BLITZER: ... or somebody who is going to be running, and then...

BENNETT: But how are you going to pick them by April? Who -- what is going to be the criteria?

BLITZER: Well...

BENNETT: That's going to be really interesting.

BRAZILE: Well, I would hope that someone who has filed with the FEC. That is an important criteria.

BENNETT: Sure. That's one criteria.

BLITZER: Real candidates who actually show up.

BRAZILE: Absolutely.

BENNETT: Absolutely.

(CROSSTALK)

BRAZILE: None of this exploratory stuff -- real candidates.

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: And we will give them some time to make...

BRAZILE: Absolutely.

BLITZER: ... to make their respective cases.

BRAZILE: And it's a good time of the year, April.

BLITZER: Early April in New Hampshire...

BRAZILE: Absolutely.

BLITZER: ... a lovely time of the year.

BENNETT: Yes.

(LAUGHTER)

BLITZER: Beautiful state, indeed.

Guys, thanks very much.

(CROSSTALK)

BENNETT: Thank you.

BLITZER: We are going to be co-sponsoring that with "The New Hampshire Union Leader," as well as WMUR-TV...

BENNETT: It's great for CNN.

BLITZER: ... up in Manchester.

BRAZILE: Great...

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: Great for CNN.

BLITZER: Excellent.

BENNETT: Good for you.

BLITZER: Thanks very much, guys.

Donna Brazile and Bill Bennett, by the way, as all of our viewers know, they are all part of the best political team on television.