

# 2026 SCGOP GUBERNATORIAL DEBATES



## DEBATE SERIES OVERVIEW

### Debate Production:

- Gray Media will provide broadcasting / streaming live in 7 SC media markets from 7-8PM for each debate.
  - The production team will be Tupelo Honey
  - EP Team: Fox Carolina (Jordan McGowen & Jackson Fields)
- Gray Media local broadcast market personalities and others chosen by the SCGOP will constitute the debate moderators and panelists for each debate.

### Regarding the Candidates:

- There will be no substitutes or stand-ins for the candidates. If a candidate fails to appear, the original program will proceed with the remaining candidates.
- Candidates will be able to preview the debate stage prior to 5PM, (time permitting) when they arrive. Campaigns must coordinate with SCGOP Executive Director Leighton Gray Smith for arrangements.
- Candidates are asked to arrive at least 30-45 minutes prior to airtime. They are free to arrive earlier and visit the SCGOP's VIP pre-receptions if they wish.
- Where possible, candidates will be provided a green room (all venues are not created equal). SCGOP Executive Director Leighton Gray Smith will communicate with the campaigns per debate re: possible arrangements.
- Make-up and a make-up artist will be available. Candidates may provide their own if desired.
- Water will be made available.
- Candidates shall not utilize cell phones or other electronic devices; nor earpieces without a note from an audiologist.
- Candidates shall bring no notes or props.
- Candidates will not wear campaign buttons or stickers.
- Candidates will be provided with a pad and pen for taking notes.
- Candidates will be escorted to the debate stage 15 minutes prior to airtime.
- Candidates may bring up to 5 family members. Names must be provided to the SCGOP 48 hours prior to each debate.

- Each campaign will be granted 4 staff passes (campaign operational staff only, not guaranteed a seat in the debate hall)

### **Regarding the Audience:**

- Attire is “business casual” or higher. No T-shirts or streetwear is permitted.
- No flags, banners or signs will be allowed, nor “negative” buttons or stickers directed at specific candidates.
- No noisemakers of any kind will be allowed.
- The SCGOP reserves the right to remove any attendee for any reason.
- Ticketing will be handled by the SCGOP with preference to SCGOP major donors and Elephant Club members.

### **Candidate Qualifications: The SCGOP will determine participation based on the following criteria:**

- Regarding status, candidates must:
  - Have declared his or her candidacy
  - Have filed an Initial Campaign Disclosure
- Regarding polling, candidates must:
  - Poll at least 2% in an average of state polls that only survey likely Republican primary voters; not paid for by a campaign or connected PAC; or other polls subject to the discretion of the SCGOP
  - Poll requirements must be met no later than 72 hours prior to the debate
- Regarding fundraising, candidates must:
  - Have raised a minimum of \$100,000, to include at least 250 unique donors contributing a minimum of \$50 each (via campaign finance disclosure or reports provided to the SCGOP).
- Candidate Pledge:
  - Candidates agree that they will support the eventual 2026 SCGOP Gubernatorial nominee
- Additional Terms:
  - Candidates agree to participate in a “Unity” event to be hosted by the SCGOP on the Saturday following a possible run-off primary.
  - If a candidate abandons his/her campaign, they will not be invited to further debates.
  - To participate, a candidate must meet all criteria listed above and be a signatory to these guidelines no less than 48 hours prior to the debate.

### **Debate Proceedings:**

- Candidate stage placement will have lower polling candidates on the ends of the stage, with the higher polling candidates to the center of the stage.

- A greeting from the State Chairman to the audience prior to going live
- Announcements and instructions from the Moderator prior to going live
- Each candidate will be allowed a 45 second opening statement, (beginning with the lowest polling candidate to the highest, as ranked in the average of polls approved by the SCGOP)
- The first question will begin with the candidate to the moderator's left; thereafter beginning with the next candidate to the right.
  - Each candidate will have 45 seconds to respond to a question.
  - No questions will be asked that cannot be reasonably asked of all candidates.
  - Each candidate will be allowed to answer the same questions
  - Questions will be related towards issues, not specific candidates.
  - Candidates will answer questions as to their positions without engaging in personal attacks.
  - The SCGOP will work with moderators to suggest issues that are relevant to the SCGOP Platform and Republican voters.
  - No candidate will have advance notice of any questions.
- Each candidate will be allowed a 30 second rebuttal, at the moderator's discretion, (if mentioned directly by name or obvious inference).
- Each candidate will be allowed a 90 second closing statement (beginning with the lowest polling candidate to the highest, as ranked in the average of polls approved by the SCGOP)
- Moderator will keep track of candidate time
- Each candidate's microphone will only be live when recognized by the moderator
  - Interrupting and speaking over another candidate who's turn it is to speak will result in 1) an initial warning, then 2) potential penalization of further questions or speaking time
- All candidates agree to maintain proper language and decorum and be respectful towards other candidates as well as the moderator and panel. Failure to do so may result in denial of further or future debate participation.

This document contains the final and entire overview of the debate series. Any changes suggested by the SCGOP shall be provided in writing.

**Acknowledged and Accepted this Day:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Candidate Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_