



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 8, 2011

Did Romney Make a Mistake in Turning Down Trump's Debate?

Trump was gracious in his response, saying: "It would seem logical to me that if I was substantially behind in the polls, especially in Iowa, South Carolina and Florida, I would want to participate in this debate. But I understand why Gov. Romney decided not to do it."



But all Trump's response did was to raise questions: Was Romney really that busy? Would his campaign benefit by his absence, appearing to be aloof and "above the fray" while his lessers battled between themselves? Did Romney want to put some distance between himself and Trump, as that relationship was appearing to be getting awfully cozy? Would Romney's absence spell the death knell for the debate now that three of the contenders were planning to be campaigning elsewhere?

At present only Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum have agreed to attend, while Rick Perry and Michele Bachmann are considering the matter. And supporters are getting nervous, especially the two "conservative" organizations who are cosponsoring the event, Americans for Tax Reform (ATR) and the American Conservative Union (ACU). Spokesmen for each urged those on the fence to join Trump in Des Moines. Grover Norquist, founder and head of ATR, [issued this statement](#):

Americans for Tax Reform strongly supports The *Newsmax* ION Television 2012 Presidential Debate. It's vital that conservatives have their own forum with the candidates, and I believe *Newsmax* and ION will provide this opportunity for us to properly vet the Republican candidates on the issues.

I am assured that Donald Trump will be a fair-minded moderator and joined by serious journalists. This contrasts with several debates that have already occurred which have been moderated by hostile members of the left-wing media. I strongly urge all GOP candidates to attend this debate.

As if on cue, ACU chairman Al Cardenas [issued his own endorsement](#) of Trump and the debate:

The American Conservative Union is proud to sponsor the upcoming *Newsmax* ION Television 2012 Presidential Debate....

Debates have already played a key role in this nominating process and present our best opportunity for comparing and contrasting candidates on core conservative issues. As the critical Iowa Caucuses quickly approach, we must continue vetting the field to ensure conservatives put forward a tested, competent leader to challenge President Obama next fall.



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We strongly encourage all Republican presidential candidates to participate.

This will be a serious debate focused on serious issues. Conservatives across the nation will appreciate a debate hosted by a trusted conservative media outlet like Newsmax that includes a spirited conversation with the candidates, led by Donald Trump, a crowd favorite among CPAC attendees.

Trump's own ["pit bull" Michael Cohen](#) got into the act as well. In an interview on *ABC News* on Tuesday he maintained,

Donald Trump's appeal is vast and includes not only conservatives, but, in essence, anyone who's interested — irrespective of party affiliation — in making America great and respected again. It is for this reason that conservatives are imploring all the GOP to participate in the *Newsmax*, Trump-moderated debate. Those that [sic] choose not to are making a grave mistake.

Those advising the uncommitted GOP candidates to stay away include Karl Rove, who [said](#) on *Fox News*: "What the heck are the Republican candidates doing showing up at a debate with a guy who says, 'I may run for president next year as an independent'?" Charles Krauthammer called the debate "a joke" while George Will urged the candidates to tell Trump, "We're not going to be hijacked and participate in this." And Ron Paul has already [given his reasons](#) for not attending: "The selection of a reality show television personality to host a presidential debate that voters nationwide will be watching is beneath the office of the Presidency.... Mr. Trump's participation will contribute to an unwanted circus-like atmosphere."

For those still undecided, it should give pause that two establishment Republican organizations are supporting and cosponsoring the event. If Bachmann and Perry fail to show, it could reflect the true reality that Trump is no serious supporter of the event save to the degree that it enhances his own image.

Photo of Mitt Romney: AP Images



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