

Republican debate brings dollars, but not top candidates, to city

By Aaron Cahall
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Tonight's Republican presidential debate won't bring the GOP frontrunners to town, but it will bring some economic benefits and national attention to Morgan State University.

"When you have a major political event that occurs in Baltimore or any other major city, from a publicity standpoint, that shows you're a major player in the political arena," said Donald C. Fry, president and CEO of the **Greater Baltimore Committee**. "It's certainly a nice feather in the cap of the city."

The debate, moderated by talk-show host Tavis Smiley and broadcast nationally on PBS, will feature just five of the Republican

candidates: Rudy Giuliani, Mitt Romney, John McCain and recently announced candidate Fred Thompson all declined to participate, citing "scheduling difficulties."

Smiley's production company chose Morgan State as the site for the debate, according to PBS spokeswoman Carrie Johnson, due to its presence as a historically African-American university and its proximity to Washington for candidates who are also members of Congress.

But it's not the first debate the campus has hosted. Morgan State sponsored a Democratic presidential debate in 2004, said university spokesman Clinton R. Coleman.

Coleman said it's difficult to place an exact dollar figure on what the debate will bring to the area, but said he didn't think the lack of GOP frontrunners would

PRESIDENTIAL FORUM ON PBS

Republican Forum
Morgan State University, Murphy
Fine Arts Center
9 to 10:30 Tonight

- » Live broadcast: Maryland Public Television
- » Moderator: Tavis Smiley, PBS
- » Panelists: Cynthia Tucker, Atlanta Journal-Constitution; Juan Williams, NPR; and Ray Suarez, PBS/The NewsHour.

cut into that figure, or the prestige reaped by Morgan State.

"I don't think it hurts the university at all, and that which we hope to glean from this, because we believe just as many people will be watching," Coleman said. "If

there's any harm inflicted by them pulling out, it's harm to them."

He said all 800 publicly available tickets went quickly, and a capacity crowd of 2,000 is expected for tonight's debate.

Fry wasn't so sure.

"The timing and the participants minimizes the impact, and it seems only a small segment of the population will be paying attention at this time," he said.

In addition to the previous debate, the 2000 NAACP convention, held in Baltimore, also brought national attention to the area, including an address by then-President Bill Clinton, said Nancy Hinds of the Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association.

"That was huge for the city, it was a national event," she said. "Anything that gains national attention is very big for the city."

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