

Stockton selected to host gubernatorial primary debates

NICHOLAS HUBA Staff Writer 19 hrs ago



Michael Ein / Staff Photographer

Stockton University President Harvey Kesselman looks over the Campus Center at the Pomona campus, Thursday Sep. 15, 2016, in Galloway Township. He was a student during the inaugural year of the college when it was housed at the Mayflower Hotel in Atlantic City. (Michael Ein/Staff Photographer)

GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP — Two primary debates for the state's highest political office will be streamed live on Facebook from Stockton University, a unique concept that helped the institution's bid to publicize this year's governor's race.

The New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission on Tuesday selected Stockton to host a Republican and a Democratic primary gubernatorial debate at the university's Campus Center Theatre, which seats 254. An additional 500 people can watch a closed-circuit screen from the adjacent Campus Center Event Room. No dates have been set.

But anybody can watch live on Facebook, a Stockton proposal that intrigued the board of the election commission, said Jeff Brindle, executive director of ELEC.

"We are moving into a digital age, and the commission decided to do something new," Brindle said following the hearing.

By using Facebook, Sharon Schulman, executive director of the school's William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy, hopes to attract a younger audience.

"I don't have any broadcast media down here, nor can I interest anyone," Schulman said. "So we came up with this novel way of doing it."

Hosting the debates will allow South Jersey residents to hear from future policymakers.

"The debates will also serve as an opportunity for the candidates to reach the southern region of our state," she said.

The school has hosted legislative, congressional and senatorial debates.

Most recently, the Hughes Center sponsored a 2nd Legislative District debate in 2015 with Republican Assemblyman Chris Brown and running mate Will Pauls and Democratic Assemblyman Vince Mazzeo and running mate Colin Bell.

"Since its founding, Stockton has emphasized the importance of political education and dialogue, the role of civic activism and voters' rights and responsibilities," university President Harvey Kesselman said.

NJTV also was selected to host a Democratic and a Republican primary debate.

Republican Kim Guadagno and Democrat Phil Murphy have a sizable lead over their primary opponents, according to a Fairleigh Dickinson University Public Mind Poll.



CRDA to cut 15 percent of staff after loss of funding

Guadagno, a two-term lieutenant governor, is the front-runner among Republicans with 24 percent support, according to the poll. Guadagno will be challenged on the Republican side by Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli, Nutley Commissioner of Public Affairs Steven Rogers, businessmen Joseph Rudy Rullo and Linwood resident Hirsh Singh.

On the Democratic side, Phil Murphy, a former U.S. ambassador to Germany, garnered 23 percent support, with his closest competitors significantly behind.

Murphy will be challenged on the Democratic side by LGBT activist and nightclub manager Paul Binetti, activist and former firefighter Bill Brennan, pharmaceutical sales representative Monica Brinson, former U.S. Undersecretary of the Treasury for Enforcement Jim Johnson, state Sen. Ray Lesniak, businesswomen Lisa McCormick, businessman Titus Pierce, Assemblyman John Wisniewski and Tenafly Borough Council President Mark Zinna.

In 2011, Stockton put in to host a 2012 presidential debate. The nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates selected other schools to host the three presidential debates and one vice presidential debate. They were the University of Denver in Colorado; Centre College in Danville, Kentucky; Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York; and Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida.

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