

First debate Sept. 23

# Ford, Carter agree to 3 debates

Associated Press  
Stay tuned for the Great Debates, starting in alphabetical order Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford, and billed as the political spectacle of the decade.

Democratic presidential nominee Carter and Republican candidate Ford agreed Wednesday to meet for three nationally televised debates, with the first live confrontation scheduled for Sept. 23, a Thursday.

The debates will be the first between presidential candidates since the clashes between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon in 1960.

Negotiators for the two candidates reached agreement on the format for the debates after an all-day meeting Wednesday with representatives of the League of Women Voters, which will sponsor the debates.

In addition to the trio of debates involving the presidential candidates, an unprecedented debate between the two vice presidential candidates, Republican Sen. Bob Dole and Democratic Sen. Walter Mondale, will be slipped in after the second Carter-Ford meeting.

The topic for the first Ford-Carter debate will be economic and domestic issues. The second debate topic will be defense and foreign policy and the final meeting will be open to any subject.

Both Ford and Carter hailed the agreement.

"I believe the American people will be the winners," Ford said.

The President earlier had spent part of the day arguing for increased defense spending and a strong U.S. military posture overseas in a speech before a National Guard group.

Then, meeting with reporters at a hastily called news conference on the White House lawn, Ford said debates "are very important" and

will give voters "an honest picture of the candidates."

Meanwhile, Carter said at his home in Plains, Ga., that the debates will not make or break either candidate unless one of them "failed miserably."

He added: "I think I can hold my own. I do intend to be aggressive and to draw as sharp a comparison as I can between President Ford and myself and our ability to lead this country."

Carter indicated that the Ford negotiators had given way on nearly every point that Carter stressed. Carter had wanted the first debate topic to be the economy and domestic affairs, which it will be, and not foreign policy, which Ford had wanted. And the debate will take place somewhere other than Washington, also as Carter had sought.

While the final details of the debates are to be decided later by the League of Women Voters, Rita Hauser of the league's organizing panel said the initial meeting will be a 90-minute session at a yet undetermined site.

Meanwhile, Carter spokesman Rex Granum said the candidate will sell his stock holdings if elected president but has not decided what to do about his Georgia peanut business or farms.

Carter made public his 1975 federal income tax returns Wednesday, showing he paid \$17,454 in taxes on a total income of \$136,138.

He also issued a financial balance sheet showing that at the end of 1975 his net worth was \$811,982, including assets of \$819,267 and liabilities of \$7,285.

According to the financial statement, the Carter holdings included \$348,444, representing the estimated market value of his 91 percent ownership of Carter Farms Inc., and \$330,062.49, representing his interest in the partnership that runs Carter's Warehouse, the family peanut business.

Ford issued a statement early in the year showing his net worth as of last year to be \$323,489.

Dole spent Wednesday stomping the red clay of Carter's home state in search of votes, telling the Georgia GOP Central Committee that the Democratic nominee is losing support in the South.

Dole was critical of Carter's record as governor of Georgia, claiming that the state's taxes increased 51 percent during Carter's term. "And this is the man who talks about tax reform," Dole said.

Granum, speaking for Carter, said later that Dole was confused and had mixed up his percentages. "Jimmy Carter served as governor of Georgia during a very prosperous four-year period and as the state's economy expanded revenues increased 51 percent - not the tax rate," he said.

In Atlanta, Dole said he and Ford aren't writing off any portion of the country, including the South. "There's only one ticket that represents the general philosophy of the South and that's the Ford-Dole ticket," he said.

Mondale campaigned in the West, stopping in Las Vegas for a speech to the United Steelworkers of America. He was critical of the records of both Ford and Dole, saying the Republican ticket "offers nothing to the working men and women of the country."

The Minnesota senator told union members they should examine the Ford record, both as a congressman and as president. "Mr. Ford's negative voting record is exceeded only by his negative record as president," Mondale said.

There were these other political developments:

Democratic senators suggested that election year politics prompted Ford to propose spending \$1.5 billion on a program to expand national parks. Noting that the measure was submitted to Congress only 23 legislative days before adjournment, Sen. J. Bennett Johnston, D-La.,

said that "the evidence of political hypocrisy is overwhelming."

Eugene McCarthy, an independent candidate for president, said his campaign is not getting enough notice from the national news media. In a speech at the National Press Club in Washington, the

former senator said more coverage has been given to Carter draining a fish pond than to McCarthy discussing issues.

The CBS television network said Ford has purchased a half hour of air time next Tuesday for a political address.

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