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Why Crowley as Hofstra Debate Moderator Matters

By [Lindsay Christ](#) on October 16th, 2012



Candy Crowley (Photo: CNN)

Candy Crowley, CNN's chief political correspondent, will become the first woman in two decades to moderate a presidential debate when she takes the stage at Hofstra University on Tuesday night.

The job as moderator is one she has said she is "wowed, amazed and excited" to have. Long Islanders feel the feat will bring a sense of fairness to the debates, too. But President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Gov. Mitt Romney have sought to limit her role.

"We feel that it broadens the playing field," said Nancy Rosenthal, co-president The League of Women Voters in Nassau County, the local chapter of the nonpartisan political group formed during the Suffrage Movement. "The voter is going to be able to get a true vantage point and not get a one-sided female or male perspective coming out because the issues affect each sex differently."

The last woman to moderate a presidential debate was ABC's Carole Simpson in 1992 when then-President George H. W. Bush faced Bill Clinton and Ross Perot. She

was the first woman selected by the Commission on Presidential Debates, who have been in charge of choosing moderators since they took over for the League of Women Voters in 1987.

Simpson's debate was also the first to have a town-hall format, where she went around the room randomly picking audience members to pose their own questions to the candidates.

Crowley will also moderate a town-hall style debate. The format gives most of the power to the questioners, who are undecided voters who've been selected by the Gallup polling organization.

The voters submit their questions on both foreign and domestic policy in advance and Crowley chooses who to call on. Each candidate has two minutes to respond to a question, and the moderator is given another minute to ask follow-up questions.

"I think a town hall debate allows the least amount of input by a moderator, so in a sense women are sort of climbing baby steps back up to the moderating level," Jane Thomas, co-president of the League of Women Voters in Nassau County said. "But at least we're back, and I think she'll do a fine job."

Crowley has been vocal about the fact that she will not sit back quietly during the debate, stating several times during interviews that she intends to ask both candidates follow-up questions to make sure that they stay on topic.

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"Once the table is kind of set by the town hall questioner, there is then time for me to say, 'Hey, wait a second, what about x, y, z?'" she told CNN's Suzanne Malveaux during an interview on Oct. 5.

Time magazine recently obtained a Commission of the Presidential Debates memo signed by lawyers for both Romney and Obama regarding the role of a moderator in the town hall style format. It states that, "the moderator will not ask follow-up questions or comment on either the questions asked by the audience or the answers of the candidates during the debate or otherwise intervene in the debate except to acknowledge the questioners from the audience or enforce the time limits, and invite candidate comments during the two-minute response period."

The agreement was signed Oct. 3, though *Time* noted that Crowley was not asked to sign it. When her "x, y, z" comments came out two days later, both the Romney and Obama campaigns reached out to the commission. The commission promised to speak to Crowley and "reconfirm her function."

A woman has moderated the vice presidential debates three times. PBS's Gwen Ifill filled the role in both 2004 and 2008 and last Thursday's debate between Vice President Joe Biden and Congressman Paul Ryan was moderated by ABC's Martha Raddatz.

"Whether a man or woman is moderator shouldn't matter," Thomas said. "But we're awfully glad that women are getting back in the picture."

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Andrew Scott · Huntington, New York

Why it matters? It matters because she has proven herself to be quite partisan in the past. She claims, for example, that the Romney-Ryan ticket "looks a little bit like some sort of ticket death wish."

Read more: <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/noel-sheppard/2012/08/11/cnns-candy-crowley-ryan-pick-looks-little-bit-some-sort-ticket-death-#ixzz29UMQkmpj>

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Lauren Dees

This was like the last moderator who had obama at her wedding. if one side knows what questions will be asked and the other side comes in blind that is a HUGE advantage.

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Michael Ferrara · Some college

Mr. Scott, there will be a rally near Hofstra on Hempstead and Walton Ave. at 6pm. A debate viewing at the Marriott will follow. BIG VOICES MEDIA will be there doing interviews. You are invited.

Reply · Like · October 16 at 11:49am



Randall Lofland · Top Commenter

It's interesting as I read that both sides agreed to muzzle her from asking follow up questions and challenging evasive answers. I'm wondering why the Democrats agreed to muzzle her. That can't make her feel good.

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Michelle Christ · Fordham University School of Law

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