

Gore says he expects 3 Primetime TV debates with Bush

by Naftali Bendavid
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Vice President Al Gore said Sunday he expects his campaign to work out a plan for three prime-time debates with Texas Gov. George W. Bush, despite friction between the two camps over the issue.

"I think that it's clearly in the public interest to have three 90-minute prime time debates sponsored by the bipartisan commission," Gore said in an interview with the Tribune aboard Air Force Two flying into Chicago. "If [Bush] is ready to accept the commission's basic recommendation, I'm certain that all the disagreements over the minor details can be worked out."

Gore declined to be specific about details.

"I'm going to let Bill Daley handle it," Gore said, referring to former Commerce Secretary William Daley, his campaign chairman, brother of Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and the Gore team's representative in discussions with Bush aides and the Commission on Presidential Debates.

That commission, headed by former chairmen of the Democratic and Republican Parties, has proposed three prime-time debates, as well as one between the vice presidential candidates.

Bush balked at that proposal and suggested that he and Gore appear in less confrontational settings. Late last week, however, he appeared to relent. Representatives of both campaigns were expected to meet Thursday, September 14, with the commission to begin hammering out final plans.

Gore came to Chicago to make a live appearance on Monday's *Oprah Winfrey Show*, to be broadcast at 9:00 a.m. on WLS-TV, Ch. 7. He then will travel to Belleville, Ill., for a town-hall meeting at Westhaven Elementary School.

Gore, who spoke cautiously during the interview, declined to say

whether he was worried about low expectations for Bush in the debates. Because Gore is considered a top-notch debater, some Democrats say that if Bush merely holds his own it will be considered a victory for the Republican.

"I'm not very good at the expecta-

Meanwhile, Bush's running mate, Dick Cheney, gave up lucrative stock options in his former company, Halliburton, after allegations they would have created a conflict of interest. Though none of the flubs has been crippling, they came at a critical time in the race as voters began to focus on the candidates.

Gore said in the interview that he typically has gained momentum in the later stages of a race.

"I always do better in the last few weeks of a campaign," he said. "I need a long

runway to get airborne. I think it's because I'm not a natural politician. But once I get airborne, so to speak, I really enjoy it a lot, and my enthusiasm for it shows, and I can hardly wait for the next day to start."

Bush has said he will begin campaigning more informally, holding town hall meetings and speaking directly to voters — something Gore has been doing. Asked about that, Gore smiled but declined to comment.

"You're witnessing self-discipline, to your disadvantage," he said. Even with Bush's recent misfortunes, most polls show Gore and Bush locked in the closest presidential contest in decades.

The tiff over debates unfolded against this backdrop. The Commission on Presidential Debates — headed by the former Democratic Chairman Paul Kirk and former Republican Chairman Frank Fahrenkopf — at first proposed Gore and Bush face off Oct. 3, Oct. 11 and Oct. 17.

Bush rejected the commission's schedule, saying he wanted to consider alternate formats. He proposed debating Gore on NBC's *Meet the Press* and CNN's *Larry King Live*.

Some Republicans feared Bush's strategy made it appear that he was afraid to debate Gore. Yet Gore said Sunday that appearing on the NBC and CNN programs is still a possibility.

"After we do the commission debates, I'll entertain all of the other invitations that have been laid down," he said.

Campaign 2000



tions game," Gore said, and then proceeded to raise expectations for Bush.

"I do think he's an excellent debater," he said. "He beat John McCain in the showdown debate in the Republican contest. He apparently did extremely well against Ann Richards and against Gary Mauro," referring to Bush's opponents in his Texas gubernatorial races.

During this campaign swing, Gore plans to focus on education and cultural values. A federal report on children and movie violence is due out this week, and Gore's running mate, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), is scheduled to testify on the subject Wednesday before the Senate Commerce Committee.

"I'll be talking about the need for reform, the need for new resources along with the new ideas," Gore said. "I'll be talking about the need to give parents a hand in their efforts to give the right values to their kids."

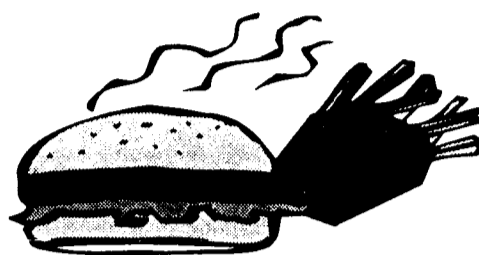
The dynamics of the presidential campaign have changed dramatically in recent weeks. After the primaries ended, it seemed Bush could do no wrong while the Gore campaign appeared to flounder. Now the situation is reversed.

Gore's choice of Lieberman a month ago was widely applauded, and was followed by a smoothly run Democratic convention and a successful boat ride down the Mississippi River. Since then, Gore has seemed far more relaxed.

In contrast, the Bush campaign has stumbled. Republicans produced an anti-Gore ad but then pulled it back.

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