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Shhhhhh! Candidates plan forum at library

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Published: Sunday, October 12, 2008 at 3:15 a.m.

Nearly all state and local candidates running for office in November will share a stage next week in the Spartanburg County Headquarters Library's Barrett Room.

It's almost sure to be more exciting than either of the two presidential debates so far.

Fifteen candidates - Republicans and Democrats in the eight contested legislative, county council and county coroner races in Spartanburg County - have confirmed they will be there. Incumbent Democratic state Sen. Glenn Reese, who faces Republican Mike Gardner, is the only candidate who will not be there.

The two-hour forum is sponsored by the League of Women Voters, Upstate Forever, 107.3 JAMZ, News Channel 7, the Herald-Journal, the Hometown News, and the county Democratic and Republican parties. A three-member panel of representatives from the news organizations will ask the questions, and a radio personality will moderate the event.

"We want everyone who is eligible to vote to vote. But before they vote, we want them to be informed about the issues and the candidates ... and the differences between the candidates for different offices, so when they go to the ballot box on Nov. 4, they won't just be marking a name," said Dianne Fergusson, president of the local chapter of the League of Women Voters.

"Citizens will get to see them on their feet, answering questions that they've never seen before."

The event is free and begins at 6 p.m. Oct. 20. Doors open a half-hour beforehand.

Candidates will not be allowed to make opening statements. They, however, will be allowed to make a one-minute closing statement.

Anyone can submit questions online or arrive early and submit a question in writing. What is asked will be left to

the discretion of the media panel.

Candidates will have one minute to answer. If the moderator determines an opponent should be allowed to respond to a point made, that person will have 30 seconds.

"They're going to have to be quick on their feet," Fergusson said. "I'm not so sure one minute is realistic, but given the number of candidates we have and the areas we want to cover, we have to stay on a time schedule."

Topics the League and Upstate Forever would like to see addressed include education, the economy, land management, criminal justice, campaign funding, conservation and recycling.

"It's a forum. There will be a little bit of back-and-forth, but there's too many people to have a rolling debate," said Shelley Robbins, project coordinator for Upstate Forever.

"We felt it was important that people get to hear as many of the candidates as possible. We don't have a particular agenda ourselves, other than getting people out and in front of the candidates. And to our knowledge, this will be the only place to do that."

The Barrett Room seats 180 people, and there will be standing room in the back.

Read Spencer's blog at www.goupstate.com/crazyworld.

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