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Firsts in the South: Debaters Square off in South Carolina

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FOX News is hosting the first 2012 presidential debate in one of the first primary states Thursday night in Greenville, S.C. Five of the men trying to become the next Republican nominee will do their best to be considered the GOP frontrunner, taking questions on everything from a weak economy to the greatest foreign policy threat. Here's your debate cheat sheet.

Former Minnesota Gov. [Tim Pawlenty](#) ^[1]

People often wonder "what if" when it comes to [Tim Pawlenty](#) ^[1]. The former governor was on the very short-list of potential running mates for [Sen. John McCain](#) ^[2] in 2008. If he was chosen then, would he be the frontrunner now? Pawlenty says he isn't upset and has plenty to tout. He enters Thursday's debate in South Carolina as perhaps the most well-known of the group. The libertarian Cato Institute says Pawlenty is a "frugal budgeter," and was one of a handful of governor's across the country to get an "A" for the way he handled his state's finances, quite a feat in a traditionally blue state. The Almanac of American Politics says he, "balanced Minnesota's budget three times without raising taxes despite facing record budget deficits." And as he looks ahead to a tough primary season, Pawlenty believes that the way he took care of business in the Land of 10,000 lakes says a lot about his leadership skills. "I wish I could tell you it was all reaching across the aisle with some great bipartisan- you know, charm and getting along. But a lot of it was just a hard slog."

Former Pennsylvania Sen. [Rick Santorum](#) ^[3]

[Rick Santorum](#) ^[3] is a former senator from the big swing state of Pennsylvania, who was beaten in a landslide in 2007 by Democratic challenger Bob Casey. Santorum says that defeat shouldn't make voters question his electability, and should instead allow him to showcase how much tougher his skin is now. He is perhaps most easily identified by his strong social conservatism, which he thinks permeates most other important issues. "We cannot have limited government unless we have good and decent people living good and virtuous lives," Santorum says. "Economic issues, in part, are moral issues," he continues. "You cannot have lower taxes unless you have a society that lives by some sort of moral consensus. And if we don't address those issues holistically, I think we're giving up the game." Santorum won the Greenville County straw poll a few weeks ago, the same county hosting Thursday's debate that's been dubbed one of the most conservative places in the entire country. But running so far to the right could pose a problem in the general election.

Businessman [Herman Cain](#) ^[4]

If the moderator of tonight's debate asks any questions about fast food or business practices in general, expect [Herman Cain](#) ^[4] to crush his competitors. The businessman has been the vice

president of Pillsbury and Burger King, as well as, the president of Godfather's Pizza chain before he bought it. Cain has never held a political office, but says that works to his advantage. "Most of the people in Washington, D.C. have held political office... how's that working out?" he asks. Not well, in his estimation. Cain is also a stage four [colon cancer](#) [5] survivor, who is healthy now, and hosting a radio show. He will be the lone African American on stage Thursday in South Carolina, and he thinks that will help his chances. "I happen to believe there are more conservative black Americans in this country than any poll will ever show." The state's First Congressional District likely agrees. They're represented by African American Tim Scott. Hailing from the neighbor state of Georgia, Cain took on President [Bill Clinton](#) [6] in 1994, telling him he didn't understand business if Clinton thought his proposed healthcare overhaul would be a good thing for the sector. Not one to shy away from the spotlight, Cain is gaining buzz, though still in smaller circles.

Texas Rep. [Ron Paul](#) [7]

There will be another godfather on stage tonight, aside from Cain, as many regard Rep. [Ron Paul](#) [7] as the original inspirer of the Tea Party. He will look to showcase the fiery personality which has earned him the top spot in the ultra-right CPAC straw poll two years running. Paul's resume is certainly diverse. An obstetrician and gynecologist by trade, he frequently votes against any legislation involving federal spending or expanding the government, and has a strong libertarian stance which highlights personal responsibility. At FOX's 2007 debate in South Carolina, Paul gained attention - good and bad - for being the only Republican potential candidate to oppose the [Iraq War](#) [8], getting in a heated debate with [Rudy Giuliani](#) [9] over the reasons behind September 11. Paul holds the record for the most money raised by an American politician in one day: over \$6 million in December 2007. His enthusiastic, intensely loyal supporters did this with the help of a "moneybomb" fundraiser back then, and they have another one planned for Thursday, marking the first GOP debate of the 2012 election season and raising nearly half a million dollars by mid-day.

Former New Mexico Gov. [Gary Johnson](#) [10]

[Gary Johnson](#) [10] says on his website that he strives to climb every continent's highest peak. He's already got four under his belt, but the other three will have to wait until after he's done running for president - an equally ambitious goal. As his nickname, "Governor Veto" attests, Johnson vetoed nearly 750 bills during his two terms as New Mexico's governor. But it's the fact that he is a Republican who advocates legalizing marijuana that really separates Johnson from the rest of pack. He says he doesn't currently drink alcohol, smoke tobacco, or use illegal drugs, but that he did smoke pot recreationally during his youth and medicinally from 2005-2008. Johnson, also libertarian minded, believes marijuana should be managed like alcohol and tobacco, which are regulated and taxed. Political analysts consistently point out that Johnson's name recognition is almost non-existent outside of New Mexico, and even in New Mexico for that matter. But Johnson does not appear discouraged. A campaign brochure boldly claims that, "When [Gary Johnson](#) [10] Goes to Washington, Everybody Goes." Starting Thursday night, we'll get to see if there's anything to that.

[2012 Election](#)

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