

AUG 31 1976

THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE



DEBATES APPROVED — The Federal Election Commission yesterday approved a series of debates between President Gerald Ford (left) and Democratic challenger Jimmy Carter

(right), to be sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Ford says he "can't wait" for the debates and Carter says he wants to "cross examine" the incumbent. (UPI)

Ford-Carter

Debate Details Pondered

By UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

The Federal Election Commission has authorized the League of Women Voters to sponsor the proposed presidential campaign debates, which Jimmy Carter predicts will start about the third week in September.

The six-member FEC unanimously agreed Monday that the League's Voter Education Fund may sponsor and raise money for the nationally - televised debates, which are expected to cost \$150,000 each.

Carter said his aides have reached a tentative agreement with Ford's camp to hold three 75 - minute debates starting shortly after mid-September. The White House would only say that progress was being made.

One remaining question is the role of independent candidates like conservative Lester Maddox and liberal Eugene McCarthy. Both have indicated they will go to court if necessary to force the networks to give them equal time with Carter and Ford.

Ford spent his first full day in Washington Monday since winning the GOP nomination, while Carter wooed Jewish and black audiences in Atlanta. Carter headed north today to see labor and Catholic groups in Washington and an ItalianAmerican audience in New York.

Carter's voice broke with emotion in Atlanta Monday night when he told a \$100-a-plate dinner raising money for the Voter Education Project that he will push for automatic voter registration.

"Whether I'm elected or not, I'm going to work hard to see that we have a bill passed in Washington — a very simple bill — that says when somebody is 18 years old and a citizen of the United States that they're registered to vote," Carter said.

This was a dream of the late Martin Luther King Jr., whose widow and father attended the banquet.

Carter told a conference of Jewish leaders in Atlanta he is committed to keeping Israel strong.

"This is not just a political statement," Carter said. "As a Christian myself, I think the formation of Israel, the founding of that nation, is a fulfillment of a Biblical prophecy."

He would insist, he said, that Arab nations recognize Israel's "right to exist in peace" and acknowledge that "the Israelis didn't cause the Palestinians' problems."

Ford is sending to Congress his proposal to double the national park system. Congressional sources indicated it had virtually no chance of passage before the November election, but Ford is expected to make it a campaign issue.

Interior Secretary Thomas Kleppe challenged a claim by Carter's camp that Ford's parks proposal is a "grandstand proposal."

Kleppe termed the Ford proposal "one of the most important conservation and recreation initiatives since the national park concept was devised 104 years ago."