

# Getting Ready to Rumble in Atlanta

June 27, 2024 by Dan McCue



(Photo by Dan McCue)

ATLANTA — The barricades have gone up and anyone seeking admission to the debate site must now pass through a security check point several blocks from CNN’s corporate headquarters here.

Of course, you don’t need a pass or media credential to gain access to the first presidential debate of 2024. All you need is to tune into CNN at 9 p.m. Eastern time for a ringside seat.

While most Atlantans appear to be going about their business, the Democratic Party is making an all-out effort to paint the city as enemy territory for former President Donald Trump.

<sup>A+</sup> Since Wednesday, the DNC has purchased advertising space on several billboards coming into town, welcoming Trump and  
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noting that he will be arriving in the city later today for the first time as a convicted felon.

Meanwhile several notable politicians, including Sens. Rev. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., and Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., and former Republican Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger, have been holding events around the city, assailing Trump while also shoring up support for President Joe Biden among local elements of organized labor and other groups.

Warnock's big, debate day morning event was an appearance with Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens, Georgia AFL-CIO President Yvonne Brooks, IBEW Business Manager for Local 613 Kenny Mullins, and Sandra Williams, president of the Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council and RWDSU.

During a rousing turn at the podium, Warnock reminded a gathering of about 200 union members that had Biden not been president, there never would have been the Inflation Reduction Act and other legislation that he said, "created over 600,000 jobs."

He also spoke of Biden's student debt forgiveness efforts, which he said are unfairly described by Republicans as a bailout to affluent students.

"Many of those who've seen their loans forgiven are people who attended community college or technical colleges, people from communities just like ours," he said.

But at the heart of his remarks was a call to action, a call for union members to band together to support the president.

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"And <sup>p</sup>pay no attention to the polls," he said. "Polls go up and <sub>a-</sub>polls go down."

“Get off the ‘pollicoaaster,’” he added. “Now is the time to do the work that wins elections.”

Afterwards, Warnock walked across the street to another union building where much of the fourth floor serves as the headquarters for the Georgia Democratic Party.

There, he participated in a press conference intended to highlight Biden’s successes in the realm of health care and the threat a second Trump presidency would pose to the Affordable Care Act and Medicare’s ability to negotiate lower prescription drug prices.

But of course, the real event will be tonight when America will be given its first chance since 2020 to judge the two leading candidates for president side by side.

On the most shallow of levels, most viewers will be judging both candidates on the very basic question of their competence.

In Biden’s case, a sharp, focused performance could go a long way toward quieting concerns about his age.

As for Trump, the main thing many viewers will be judging is his demeanor. While no one expects a statesmanlike performance, an overly comparative or erratic presentation could sink him, pundits said privately this week.

Even those inclined to prefer a second Trump presidency acknowledge on background that the “smell test” will be whether a large number of Republican voters come away from the debate believing another four years of a Trump presidency is worth the inevitable heartburn that will come with it.

Personalities aside, the television audience will likely be watching for a sense of how the candidates will handle the

economy in a second term.

By any number of measures, the economy has grown strongly under Biden, though many voters ignore those measures in favor of expressing concern over inflation, which has zapped their buying power in the years since the pandemic.

Sen. Rev. Raphael Warnock addresses union members on debate day morning. (Photo by Dan McCue)

While Biden can argue that inflation is slowly being tamed, Trump will likely counter with an argument premised on rent, groceries and energy prices being lower in the early years of his administration.

Biden will also likely stress his intention to make the wealthy pay their “fair share” and attack Trump’s intention to extend his 2017 tax cut for the rich and corporations.

Trump is expected to stand firm on extending his tax cut tonight, and will likely heavily tout his desire to lower the corporate tax rate to 20%.

When it comes to business, both candidates come into the debate having said they want to increase tariffs on Chinese goods.

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Biden, however, will stress that he wants to take a more targeted approach to how tariffs are used in his second term.

Trump has proposed higher across-the-board tariffs, but some analysts have said such an approach could actually push inflation even higher and stymie economic growth.

Economics aside, viewers will also get an earful on health care tonight, and especially on abortion rights.

Expect president Biden to blast Trump relentlessly on the issue and vow to pass legislation to assure universal access to abortion no matter where a woman lives.

If Democrats expect the abortion issue to be their strength heading into the election, Trump and his allies will likely lean on illegal immigration, the GOP's most potent issue.

The debate itself has not been without its controversies. Several black-owned media outlets have claimed they were excluded from the credentialing process.

Meanwhile, the White House Correspondents' Association continues to protest the exclusion of the White House travel pool from inside the studio for the presidential debate.

Kelly O'Donnell, president of the association said in a statement Thursday that the organization has reached out to the White House, the campaigns of both President Biden and former President Trump and the debate host network CNN, to no avail.

"We appreciate that CNN is providing a television feed of the debate to other networks and will grant access to still photographers from various news outlets to cover the candidates inside the studio. Those are positive actions that WHCA fully supports," O'Donnell said.

“However, WHCA is deeply concerned that CNN has rejected our repeated requests to include the White House travel pool inside the studio,” she continued. “Through conversations and advocacy, we urged CNN to grant access to at least one print pool reporter for the duration of the debate. WHCA has been informed that one print reporter will be permitted to enter the studio during a commercial break to briefly observe the setting.

“That is not sufficient in our view and diminishes a core principle of presidential coverage. The White House pool has a duty to document, report and witness the president’s events and his movements on behalf of the American people,” she said.

O’Donnell explained that pool “is there for the ‘what ifs?’ in a world where the unexpected does happen.

“A pool reporter is present to provide context and insight by direct observation and not through the lens of the television production. A pool reporter is an independent observer whose duties are separate from the production of the debate as a news event. The pool reporter works on behalf of the entire White House press corps,” she continued, adding, “Print pool reports are an important part of the historical record.

“Further, the pool is screened by the US Secret Service and travels with the president on Air Force One so there is no security issue,” O’Donnell said.

The Biden campaign told WHCA it supports our request. The Trump campaign told WHCA it would not oppose the inclusion of the White House pool reporter. The Trump campaign has a separate press corps.

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O’Donnell stressed that CNN is a good citizen of our association and a vital partner in the daily coverage of the White House

press corps.

“We recognize CNN is investing significant resources to host this debate and we wish them every success,” she said.

“WHCA respectfully requests that CNN adjust its plan and welcome the White House travel pool print representative to witness the debate in full for the sake of the news cycle, for history and mostly importantly for the American people,” O’Donnell said.

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