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March 10, 2008

Franklin Institute to host hi-tech presidential debate *Pennsylvania universities and leaders back FI's debate on economy & technology*

PHILADELPHIA – The Franklin Institute has teamed with Science Debate 2008, The Council on Competitiveness, and several Pennsylvania universities to host a presidential candidates debate dedicated to the economy and technology, climate change, health policy, and education.

“Pennsylvania is a model state for transforming from a rust belt economy into a vibrant science & technology economy competing on a global scale,” said debate organizer Shawn Lawrence Otto, CEO of Science Debate 2008. “These are the big issues facing our economy nationally, and there is no better place for the candidates to debate them. We’ve had dozens of generic debates, we don’t need another. What we need is a debate focusing on how we’re going to move this nation ahead in terms of the global economy and high quality jobs, tackling clean energy and climate change, reinvigorating science and math education, and solving our healthcare system. Our signers represent 125 million Americans who are interested in these issues and how we can do nationally what Pennsylvania is doing as a state.”

The debate has been set for April 18 at The Franklin Institute. The group is in communication with the campaigns, and members of the Science Debate 2008 organizing committee as well as the National Academy of Sciences and the Council on Competitiveness, a group of university and corporate CEOs focused on economic competitiveness, will be in Philadelphia on Friday, March 14th, to begin preliminary preparations and make further announcements at an expected 11 AM press conference at The Franklin that day.

“Philadelphia is the cradle of democracy and The Franklin Institute, the nation’s memorial to Benjamin Franklin, is a monument to Franklin’s insight that science and technology cannot be separated from sound public policy in a free society,” states Dennis M. Wint, President and CEO of The Franklin Institute. “We are proud to host Science Debate 2008, because this debate fully aligns with our mission to engage people in meaningful ways about the impact of science on the most critical issues of our time.”

Major PA institutions and national leaders sign on to support the debate

Among the leaders calling for the forward-thinking debate is Intel Chairman Craig Barrett. “This is not a niche debate,” said Barrett. “The future economic success of the United States depends on outperforming the competition with smart people and smart ideas. Without the best education system and aggressive investments in basic research and development we will become a second rate economic power. With its outstanding universities and transforming economy, Pennsylvania is a perfect place for this discussion, and we hope the candidates for president take this very seriously.”

Former White House chief of staff and CEO of the Center for American Progress, John Podesta, agrees. “I would urge the candidates to come,” said Podesta. “Having worked in the White House, I know how much science policy drives innovation, and innovation drives the economy, it’s also critical to our national security interests, and the candidates need to discuss the most important issues facing the American public and how science is going to influence decision-making in a new administration. It’s critical to the future of our country and to the future of the planet.”

So far in Pennsylvania, Science Debate 2008 has growing support from some major players. Drexel University, Carnegie Mellon University, Temple University, Lehigh University, Lafayette College, the Chemical Heritage Foundation, The Fox Chase Cancer Center, and the Franklin Institute have all signed on institutionally to the initiative, as have their presidents. It has also gained executive level support from GlaxoSmithKline, Merck, and the University of Pennsylvania, as well as the Executive Directors of the Society of Environmental Journalists, the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics, Living Beyond Breast Cancer, The Scientist magazine and the Pepper Hamilton law firm. See <http://www.sciencedebate2008.com/www/index.php?id=7>

Some analysts are calling the Science Debate initiative unique in the history of American politics. Organized by a couple of out of work screenwriters, ScienceDebate2008.com signers now include over 35,000 scientists, engineers, and concerned citizens, 140 leading American universities and other organizations in the field of health, science, technology, the environment, engineering and education representing some 125 million Americans, as well as several members of congress from both parties, top flight business leaders, the presidents of over eighty major universities, writers, journalists, and the editors of nearly every major American science publication. The initiative is also being cosponsored by the National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine, the National Academy of Engineering, the Council on Competitiveness, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. “I am in this for my son,” said Otto, one of the screenwriter-organizers of the initiative. “I am concerned about the kind of world we’re going to leave for his generation, and I believe the candidates have a moral obligation to the children of this country to debate these issues more fully.”

On the web:

Science Debate 2008 <http://www.sciencedebate2008.com>

Video statements <http://www.sciencedebate2008.com/www/index.php?id=23>

Quotable written statements <http://www.sciencedebate2008.com/www/index.php?id=18>

List of prominent supporters <http://www.sciencedebate2008.com/www/index.php?id=7>

Congressman Bart Gordon’s press release calling for the debate (Chair, House S & T Committee):
<http://science.house.gov/press/PRArticle.aspx?NewsID=2057>

National Science Board report:
Science and Engineering Indicators 2008
<http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/seind08/>

National Academies report:
Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future
http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/oer/nac/documents/Gathering_Storm.pdf

Business Roundtable report:
Tapping America’s Potential: The Education for Innovation Initiative
<http://64.203.97.43/pdf/20050803001TAPfinalnb.pdf>