

CNN Will Let Every Candidate Debate Tonight—Except This One

There are now 16 candidates running for the Republican presidential nomination. CNN thinks you deserve the chance to hear from 15 of them.

No, news execs did not kick out George Pataki, the pro-choice, pro-gay Republican dubbed by reporters as “the longest of longshots,” who last ran for office in 2002.

Instead, they have excluded the much more conservative Governor Jim Gilmore of Virginia.

Not only is Gilmore more conservative on social issues, but he’s actually beaten Pataki in some polls. Rasmussen shows Gilmore rising from July to August, while Pataki declined to 0 *percent* support.

“CNN’s decision to keep me, and only me, out of the Reagan Library debate is an attempt to muzzle someone who forcefully opposes the candidates preferred by CNN and by the Republican leadership,” Gilmore said.

His grievance is all the more legitimate, since CNN recently changed its criteria to promote Carly Fiorina into tonight’s prime time debate.

“Along with the [Republican National Committee], they are trying to narrow the Republican field to their chosen front-runners and they don’t want to allow me the debate time to critically question Donald Trump’s ridiculous proposal to eliminate birthright citizenship or Jeb Bush’s head-in-the-clouds support for Common Core,” he said.

Gilmore has not had any trouble mixing it up in previous

debates. During a debate in the 2008 presidential primaries, he criticized a liberal candidate named “Rudy McRomney” and proceeded to show how the 2008 GOP front-runners were more liberal than the party’s voters. More recently, he called on Republican Congressional leaders—House Speaker John Boehner and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell—to resign over their handling of the Iran deal.

The issue can’t be that there are too many people on the stage at the 6 p.m. event. While 11 candidates debate at 8 p.m., only four will share the dais at 6 p.m. Rick Perry had been scheduled to join them before he dropped out of the race last Friday.

Frankly, several of the contenders in this overcrowded field register at roughly 1 percent support or less—all of whom will be on the stage tonight. Lindsey Graham, Bobby Jindal and Rick Santorum all run roughly neck-and-neck with Pataki and Gilmore.

At this stage in the election process, anyone can rise or fall in the polls before the Iowa caucus. Two recent winners—Santorum and Mike Huckabee—rose from virtual obscurity to take the top prize. And the move gives the impression that some people are given preferential treatment, while others are singled out.

This is another reason why every primary candidate should be allowed to debate.