

What's in store for the 2012 Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner?

Tom Gallagher | Mar. 20, 2012 NCR Today

The [Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation](#) [1] was founded by Cardinal Francis Spellman in 1946 to honor the memory of Alfred Emanuel Smith, New York's renowned governor and patron of the "little people." The Al Smith Foundation brings hope to the neediest children of the Archdiocese of New York, regardless of race, creed or color, according to its website.

In 1918, to the surprise of many, Al Smith was elected governor of the state of New York. Although he lost the 1920 election, he ran successfully again in 1922, 1924 and 1926 -- making him one of three New York state governors to be elected to four terms. While governor, he achieved the passage of extensive reform legislation, including improved factory laws, better housing requirements and expanded welfare services. Additionally, he reorganized the state government into a consolidated and business-like structure.

Gov. Smith won the Democratic Party's nomination for president of the United States in 1928. Smith was the first Catholic presidential nominee of a major political party. During his campaign, he continued to champion the cause of urban residents. Smith lost in a landslide to Republican Herbert Hoover.

Every October, the Al Smith Foundation holds its annual dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in midtown Manhattan. It is one of the year's must-attend events by elected officials, prominent media personalities and business executives, among others. In a presidential election year, each party's candidate is invited to attend and offer up humorous, knee-slapping one-liners that poke gentle fun at himself and the other candidate, and any other timely topic.

Thanks to YouTube, you can watch a condensed 10-minute video of senators John McCain and Barack Obama at the 2008 dinner at the foundation's [Media Center tab on its website](#) [2]. It's very funny.

I recommend you also watch the Al Gore vs. George W. Bush speeches from the 2000 dinner, which I attended. If Gore performed on the campaign trail the way he did that night, he would have won the election. He was hysterical.

In light of the current kerfuffle between the U.S. bishops and the Obama administration on the HHS contraception mandate, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York, who is president of the Al Smith Foundation, will have to decide whether Obama and his Republican challenger will be invited this year.

The rationale for preventing the presidential candidates from coming together for a terrific evening is straightforward. Sen. John Kerry, a Catholic and presidential candidate in 2004, was not invited to the annual dinner because of his position on abortion.

Importantly, the foundation considers its annual dinner as a neutral setting focused on a charitable purpose: helping children. It is not an opportunity for promoting a political viewpoint. It's considered a moment to step back and be together around the common purpose to help underprivileged children.

The better decision would be to bring Obama and his Republican challenger together for the evening and allow Dolan to deepen, on a more personal level, his relationship with Obama and the Republican opponent. Plus the laughs are priceless.

It is expected that both Obama and the Republican challenger will be invited.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/24/2017 - 11:30): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/whats-store-2012-alfred-e-smith-memorial-foundation-dinner>

Links:

[1] <http://www.alsmithfoundation.org/>

[2] <http://www.alsmithfoundation.org/mediacenter.html>