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# GOP straw poll set for Saturday

By Tommy Stevenson

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TUSCALOOSA | As many as 300 people are expected to participate in a Republican presidential straw poll here on Saturday, organizers say.

Dwayne Fowler, the president of the West Alabama Republican Assembly, said representatives for most of the major candidates vying for the GOP nomination are also expected to make their pitches before votes are cast at the Bryant Conference Center.

"The campaigns of Mitt Romney, Rudy Giuliani, Fred Thompson and Ron Paul have definitely said they will have representatives there, and some of the others, like John McCain, may also have people speak for them," Fowler said.

"For those who don't have anyone from the campaign come, we will let their supporters speak for them."

The event, which Fowler said is the only straw poll Republican groups have scheduled for Alabama, will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and will cost \$35 to participate in.

"People are coming from Mobile, Huntsville, Birmingham, Montgomery and, of course, from all over West Alabama," Fowler said.

The West Alabama Republican Assembly, which is affiliated with the national Republican Assembly, has been in existence for more than eight years and has about 35 active members, Fowler said.

"We are trying to get more active and thought this would be a good way to do it, especially since no one else seems to be having a straw poll before next year's primaries," he said.

The Democrats and Republicans are holding primaries on Feb. 5 next year, although by that time many of the current candidates may have dropped out and presumptive nominees may have emerged.

Barry Thompson, the chairman of the Tuscaloosa County Republican Party, said his organization is not involved in the straw poll, but offered encouragement for it.

"I'm sure a lot of our members will be at the event and take active roles," he said. "I'm looking forward to see who wins -- it will be the first time we will get a real feel for what is going on with our party in Alabama."

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