

'Meet the Press' show will meet the Tetons

*By Angus M. Thuermer Jr., Jackson Hole, Wyoming
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Tom Brokaw on Sunday will host Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal and Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter Jr. on "Meet the Press," a show to be taped with a Teton backdrop Saturday.

Brokaw, who will moderate the show through the November election as a result of the June 20 death of Tim Russert, will forego the traditional "Meet the Press" studio backdrop in favor of the mountains, the show's executive director said Thursday. Portions of the show will be taped at the Jackson Hole Golf and Tennis resort, Betsy Fischer said in a telephone interview from Washington, D.C.

Asked whether NBC would import its "Meet the Press" studio, a broadcast icon, or a similar backdrop, she responded "No, no, no."

"When we have a mountain view, we're going to want to see a mountain view," Fischer said.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger also will be on the program in a segment that will be taped, but not in Jackson Hole, she said. The topic will be "The West: Battleground 2008," and the three governors will discuss issues at play in the November election.

Freudenthal is hosting the Western Governors Association's annual meeting in Jackson Hole this weekend, which both Ritter and Brokaw are attending. Brokaw is set to address the group Sunday.

"This worked out perfectly," Fischer said of the scheduling.

Taping will be Saturday evening.

The governors are expected to address energy, the environment, gun ownership and other topics, Fischer said.

"It's some issues we've been wanting to talk about," she said.

Brokaw has a personal understanding of the West as the owner of ranch property in Montana. The program comes during a presidential election in which Western states, once an afterthought, may be more important on the national scene.

The Democratic National Convention will be in Denver, and both presumptive nominees, Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain, have campaigned across the region. During the Democratic primary, both Obama and Sen. Hillary Clinton campaigned in Wyoming, a state with only three presidential electoral votes.

A changing demographic in the Rockies — such as a growing population and the immigration of residents with new views regarding the exploitation of resources — is altering the political face of an area that has long been a Republican stronghold. Both Freudenthal and Ritter are Democrats; Schwarzenegger is a Republican.

"Meet the Press" broadcasts from 8 to 9 a.m. on KJWY NBC 2 in Jackson.

Russert, one of the mainstays of television journalism's political talk, suffered a heart attack while at work and could not be revived. He was 58.