

## **Republicans spar over immigration overhaul; White House hopefuls firm on support for war**

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### **Body**

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GOFFSTOWN, N.H. -- **Republicans** running for president vowed to get tougher on terrorists and illegal immigrants Tuesday night in a wide-ranging debate sprinkled with attacks on their Democratic counterparts.

The leading candidates stuck by their previous **support** for President Bush's policy in Iraq, with former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani saying the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was "absolutely the right thing to do." Former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney said he would not go that far based on what he knows now.

Arizona Sen. John McCain, who has tied himself most closely to Bush's **war** policy, said "we must succeed." Even if Bush's current policy of increasing U.S. troops in Baghdad isn't working several months from now, McCain said, withdrawing from Iraq should not be the only alternative.

Nine of the 10 GOP candidates **support** staying in Iraq. Rep. Ron Paul of Texas wants to withdraw U.S. troops immediately.

Giuliani is leading most national polls for the GOP nomination, followed by McCain and Romney.

The candidates also said a tactical nuclear attack against Iran should not be ruled out if the Iranian government refuses to give up its nuclear ambitions. "This **war** is a real **war**," Giuliani said, belittling Democrats for saying that Iran did not constitute an immediate threat.

Giuliani and Romney both attacked the **immigration** bill pending in Congress that McCain helped write. Giuliani called it "a typical Washington mess" that would not keep track of who has left the country. He said it's "quite possible" the bill would make things worse instead of better.

Romney was asked to revive a spat he's had with McCain, who said Monday in Miami that "pandering for votes on this issue while offering no solutions amounts to doing nothing, and doing nothing is silent amnesty."

Romney called McCain "my friend" and said their disagreements are not personal. Romney said the real problem with the bill is that it allows illegal immigrants in the USA to pay fines and take other steps to become citizens. "That's not fair to the millions and millions of people around the world who would love to come here," he said.

Going into Tuesday's debate, both the **war** and the **immigration** bill were unpopular with registered voters. In a USA TODAY/Gallup Poll released Monday, those who have a view on the **immigration** bill lined up nearly 3-1 against a compromise **supported** by Bush and Senate Democratic leaders. Rep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado has based his entire presidential campaign around his anti-**immigration** stance.

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The bill would increase security along U.S. borders and give about 12 million immigrants living illegally in the USA a chance to become citizens. It also would expand the "guest worker" program and give more weight to job skills and less to family ties when granting visas to new immigrants.

While the Iraq war and the global fight against terrorism dominated the Democrats' debate, Republicans also were asked about social issues such as abortion and gays in the military. The GOP candidates stood by current policy, in which gays and lesbians can serve but not be open about their sexual orientation. The eight Democratic contenders want to end the policy.

The Republicans also said that former White House aide Lewis "Scooter" Libby got a raw deal Tuesday when he was sentenced to 30 months in prison for lying to the FBI and a federal grand jury. Half of the candidates said they would consider granting Libby a pardon because of what Giuliani and Romney said was "prosecutorial abuse."

The debate at Saint Anselm College, which followed a Democratic showdown here Sunday, was the third held by Republicans this year. It was sponsored by CNN, WMUR-TV and the New Hampshire Union Leader. CNN's Wolf Blitzer served as moderator.

Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas; former governors Mike Huckabee of Arkansas, Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin and Jim Gilmore of Virginia; and Rep. Duncan Hunter of California also participated in the debate.

This was the first debate since former Tennessee senator and Law & Order co-star Fred Thompson said he expects to join the Republican field next month. Thompson was set to get about 30 minutes by himself on Fox News Channel after the debate.

Lawrence reported from Washington

## Graphic

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**Person:** JOHN MCCAIN (89%); RUDY GIULIANI (79%); MITT ROMNEY (79%); THOMAS G TANCREDO (58%); RON PAUL (58%)

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