

Ga. candidates take a hard line; Barnes backs an Arizona approach; Johnson says copy Guantanamo Bay.

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Body

Former Gov. Roy **Barnes**, the front-runner in the Democratic primary for governor, **said** during a debate Friday that he would support an **Arizona**-type law in **Georgia** to fight illegal immigration.

While **Barnes** made the strongest endorsement among the Democratic gubernatorial **candidates** for adopting an **Arizona**-type law --- which would allow state and local law officers to ask people already stopped for possible violations to show proof they are in the country legally --- it fell far short of what some Republicans suggested at their own debate Friday.

The strongest recommendations included roundups of illegal immigrants to be detained in state prison camps or dumped in the nation's capital.

"If we have to set up a **Guantanamo Bay** of **Georgia**, I would do it," former Sen. Eric **Johnson** of Savannah **said** during the GOP debate being taped at WSB TV.

The debate was hosted by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and PolitiFact **Georgia**, WSB TV and WSB Radio, and the League of Women Voters. It will air today on Channel 2 WSB-TV. The Democratic **candidates**' debate will begin at 10 a.m. and the Republicans' debate at 11 a.m.

Of the Republicans, Ray McBerry of Henry County came closest to **Johnson**'s stance.

McBerry **said** he would work with local sheriffs to round up illegal immigrants and, if necessary, bus them to Washington and drop them off by the White House.

Insurance Commissioner John Oxendine, the front-runner in the GOP race, **said** he wanted to sue the federal government to recover state money spent on the education, health care and prison costs of illegal immigrants.

"I'm tired of **Georgia** taxpayers paying for illegal aliens because the federal government has fallen down on the job," **said** Oxendine of Gwinnett County.

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Other Republican **candidates took** a more sober **approach**. Former U.S. Rep. Nathan Deal **said** he would sign an **Arizona**-type law.

Pressed to **say** how far he would go to "cleanse" the state of illegal immigrants, Deal **said** "it is largely a federal issue" but that **Georgia** "can be a responsible partner in the process."

State Sen. Jeff Chapman of Brunswick **said** he would be careful before committing the state to an expensive roundup. He **said** deporting illegal immigrants would be costly, but he **said** passing an **Arizona**-type law might deter more illegal immigrants from coming to the Peach State. "Doing nothing is not acceptable," he **said**.

In **backing** an **Arizona**-type law, **Barnes said** he would want to ensure the law would not result in racial profiling. Thorough training could accomplish that, he **said**.

Barnes also **said** it was wrong for the federal government to sue **Arizona** over the law.

"I don't have any problem with federal laws being enforced by state officials," he **said**. "We do that all the time."

Georgia's other Democratic hopefuls offered different positions. Attorney General Thurbert Baker **said** after the debate Friday that he would consider signing an **Arizona**-style law, but he added that he "would never commit to signing it without having seen it."

Georgia House Minority Leader DuBose Porter and former Adjutant General David Poythress **said** they would want to wait on the outcome of the federal lawsuit before signing such legislation.

John Pruitt of Channel 2 Action News was the moderator of the debates. Questioners were Jim Galloway, who writes the AJC's Political Insider column and blog; Condace Pressley from News Talk 750; and Lori Geary of Channel 2 Action News.

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