



ELECTIONS

JULY 13, 2017 7:38 PM

Three candidates clash on gun control leading up to state Senate primary

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A political forum for state Senate candidates turned into a fiery discussion on gun control Wednesday night, with one candidate saying he strongly believes people should be able to carry guns anywhere, with one exception: church.

“I would never carry a gun to church. That is crazy. Why would someone do that?” said Republican candidate Lorenzo Palomares, who said he believes everywhere else is fine.

Loud cheers could be heard from three people in the audience clad in all red and wearing “Make American Great Again” hats.

Democratic candidate Annette Taddeo challenged Palomares with a question: “What about the danger of having guns in classrooms?”

“Imagine if guns were allowed in school and two children got into a fight and they somehow had access to a gun. Just imagine the horror that would bring to our schools,” she said, to claps and whistles from her own group of supporters.

Palomares’ comment sparked a heated rebuttal from other people in the audience, which was packed into the auditorium at Miami Dade College’s Kendall campus.

“What about the Charleston shooter inside the church and the school shootings?” one attendee shouted back at Palomares.

Palomares quickly added that he strongly believes in background checks, and if someone is convicted of a crime they should lose their gun rights.

Democrat Ana Rivas Logan, also vying for the open seat in District 40, was surprised at Palomares’ casual stance on guns.

Rivas Logan reasoned if you need a license to drive a car, you should need a license to buy and own a gun. She also spoke about her concerns regarding mental health and gun owners.

“In this time you cannot be sure who is all well in the head and still you can carry a gun,” she said. “We have a problem with our healthcare system and people need help.”

Her answer angered Palomares’ supporters, who began booing her.

The political forum gave candidates the opportunity to discuss how they would handle issues in Tallahassee if they are elected to the state Senate on Sept. 26 after a July 25 primary. The special election in District 40 came about when Republican Sen. Frank Artiles resigned in disgrace after hurling racial slurs in the presence of two African-American lawmakers.

Former state Sen. Alex Diaz de la Portilla and State Rep. Jose Felix Diaz, the two other Republican candidates running in the primary election, were no-shows at the forum hosted by the League of Women Voters.

The three candidates who did appear all agreed on one thing: Teachers are underpaid and each said they would make increasing teachers' salaries a priority if elected.

Taddeo also said she supported Floridians' right to smoke marijuana for medical reasons.

In June, legislators approved rules for the use of medical marijuana, but it banned smoking for medical purposes. The legislation followed the approval by Florida voters of an amendment last November allowing the use of medical marijuana.

"If medical marijuana helps take care of people in pain then we need to listen to the 71 percent of people who voted in favor of it," Taddeo said.

Palomares also said he would uphold the voters' choice, but that the details of the legislation would have to be rewritten.

Rivas Logan did not comment on her personal views of medical marijuana but said she believes in the voters' right to choose.

"You are there in Tallahassee to implement the will of the people," Rivas Logan said.

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