

# Debate | Accuse each other of changing view on casino gaming

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at Windham High School moderated by two conservative Republicans, Smith and Lamontagne spoke with one voice embracing primacy for the 10th Amendment, personal property rights, dismantling onerous state regulations and getting the federal government out of setting education policy.

The two did accuse one another of changing their view on legalizing a casino for political if not also financial reasons.

Smith said Lamontagne's outspoken support for Rockingham Park in neighboring Salem as the exclusive place for a casino was because Lamontagne's law firm for over 30 years has lobbied for slots or casinos there.

The Londonderry media consultant said he'd favor up to two casinos but they should be competitively bid and not picked as a monopoly by a future governor.

"My proponent's law firm

that he represents, they represent and lobby for Rockingham Park," Smith said.

Later he declared, "I think the voters need someone who is very up front with them on how he stands on this particular issue."

Lamontagne, who in the mid-1990s opposed slot machines for racetracks, bristled that his employer had anything to do with his change of heart.

"I personally take exception that my position as a candidate and certainly as governor that I would be influenced by that," said Lamontagne who said he would sever all ties with his law firm if elected.

Lamontagne did vow to veto any initial casino bill that does anything beyond giving a single casino at Rockingham but left open supporting casinos for other locations in the future.

"I do not subscribe to

the view that expanded gambling belongs in any location where a successful business can be found," Lamontagne said.

"We need leadership in the governor's office."

Lamontagne said it was Smith who was less than candid, failing to mention that for three years he helped lead the fight against expanded gambling as executive director of Cornerstone Action, a fiscal and socially conservative interest group.

"I think we have seen an election year conversion here and people should take stock of that," Lamontagne said.

On guns, the GOP-led state Senate in May killed legislation the House had passed to let residents carry a concealed weapon without either a state or federal permit. Gov. John Lynch had threatened the veto the bill

and law enforcement leaders across the state had opposed it.

Smith said he's the only candidate for governor with a voting record for Second Amendment rights, but he had concerns about constitutional carry.

"What I would like to see if we change the law is to have a study about it," Smith said.

Lamontagne said he's not indecisive on the issue.

"I don't need a study. If the Legislature passes constitutional carry with the proper provisions, I will sign that bill," Lamontagne said.

In an Aug. 17 letter to New Hampshire gun owners obtained by The Telegraph, former GOP Gov. Craig Benson criticized Lamontagne for praising ex-Gov. John Lynch and saying he'd leave his Republican credentials at the door as governor.

Lamontagne's comments

would not "fulfill the promise" of the state's Live Free or Die motto, Benson wrote.

A Lamontagne spokesman said Benson was misinformed.

"We respect the governor's opinion, but he's acting on bad information," spokesman Tom Cronin said. "Ovide is a staunch defender of the Second Amendment, the only gun owner in this race and four square for constitutional carry."

One gun owner lobby group, the New Hampshire Firearms Coalition, recently endorsed Lamontagne over Smith in this race.

On several occasions Thursday night, the front-runner Lamontagne stressed that whoever wins the Sept. 11 primary will have the full support of the GOP.

"We are one team. You know that. There is a primary process, an intrasquad scrimmage, but on Sept.

12, we are one team and we are going to be together, right, Kevin?" Lamontagne asked Smith, who nodded in agreement.

The Southern New Hampshire 912 Project, a non-partisan organization with conservative leanings, sponsored the forum.

Democratic candidates Maggie Hassan and Jackie Cilley declined an invite to take part in a separate forum the group offered to host.

Republican activist Andrew Hemingway and Paul Wescott, political talk show host on WGIR-AM in Manchester, asked the candidate questions along with audience members.

This was the final joint appearance before the only televised debate of the primary campaign, next Thursday night at the New Hampshire Institute of Politics on the campus of Saint Anselm College.

WMUR-TV and The New Hampshire Union Leader are co-sponsoring that event.



SMITH



LAMONTAGNE