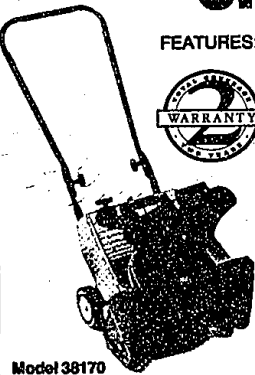


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Prosecutor hopefuls debate plea bargaining, experience

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

With time running out and polls showing them in something of a statistical dead heat, the candidates for Oakland County prosecutor are in the attack mode.

Republican David Gorecya and Democrat Steven Kaplan repeatedly ripped into each other — often going for the throat — Tuesday when they shared the stage at the only debate-like forum of the campaign.

The forum was sponsored by the Detroit College of Law — the law school alma mater of each candidate — at Michigan State University. It was attended by a small group of highly partisan supporters who occasionally cheered their favorite, much like the audience at a participatory television game show.

Each candidate went into the debate with an idea of his own strength, and each repeated it often, trying to drive it home to voters.

"When Oakland voters select the next prosecutor, they should select a prosecutor, not a defense attorney," said Kaplan, who has been a Macomb County assistant prosecutor for 10 years.

Kaplan insists that he — having won 13 of 14 homicide cases — has the experience needed.

Gorecya repeatedly promised "tough justice" in the mode of L. Brooks Patterson and a firm policy against plea bargaining or negotiating away victims' rights.

"This race is not just about experience," said Gorecya, who was an Oakland assistant prosecutor for two years before going into private practice, including defense work. "It's about charac-



STAFF PHOTO BY WILLIAM HANSEN

Going head-to-head: Prosecutor candidates David Gorecya and Steven Kaplan squared off at a forum sponsored by their law school alma mater. The hour-long show will be rebroadcast on TCI cable network.

ter, integrity, honesty and leadership. I want to make Oakland County the safest place in the U.S."

On their own or in response to questions from law students and a panel of three reporters and a law school professor, Kaplan and Gorecya outlined similar views on a number of issues.

On assisted suicide, for example, each expressed misgivings about Dr. Jack Kevorkian, but each said he could not be prosecuted under existing law. Each said assisted suicide was a personal decision, but Kaplan wants the practice regulated while Gorecya wants Lansing to be decisive.

"I will enforce the law," he said, but added the legislature should enact a workable law or make the practice legal.

Each candidate said he supports efforts to put capital punishment on a referendum ballot. "We as citizens are being deprived of the opportunity to vote on that issue," said Kaplan.

Each candidate said he would plea bargain sparingly.

"I believe in the L. Brooks Patterson style of prosecution," said Gorecya. "I will follow plea bargaining policies with common sense... for a greater good or to get a bigger fish."

Kaplan said he would never plea bargain on violent offenses, but would consider negotiating on first offenses or when testimony of an accomplice is needed to get the defendant with more involvement — "the trigger man or the drug supplier."

Kaplan accused Gorecya of flip

See DEBATE, A20

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