

# Salt Lake district attorney candidates paint opposing pictures of office during debate

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Video:

[https://www.facebook.com/ABUEdFund/videos/449028155505034/UzpfSTE4NDM1MDIwNDkyMjE4NDoyMTE5NDUzMjQxNDExODYx/?\\_tn=K-R&eid=ARDI1tgoEz0tZpjEBOpC7H\\_VrmY-W8L-avzqPRpjxz1ugG5vNagaJwR6b8prvIEJTdgucF4dZTuzmZka&ref=mentions](https://www.facebook.com/ABUEdFund/videos/449028155505034/UzpfSTE4NDM1MDIwNDkyMjE4NDoyMTE5NDUzMjQxNDExODYx/?_tn=K-R&eid=ARDI1tgoEz0tZpjEBOpC7H_VrmY-W8L-avzqPRpjxz1ugG5vNagaJwR6b8prvIEJTdgucF4dZTuzmZka&ref=mentions)

Link: <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/900034955/salt-lake-district-attorney-candidates-paint-opposing-pictures-of-office-during-debate.html>

SALT LAKE CITY — Two political candidates for Salt Lake County's top prosecutor offered starkly different views of the office in a Wednesday evening debate that at times became boisterous.

Democratic incumbent Sim Gill said he has stuck to his budget and adapted to the evolving role of a prosecutor — seeking to address lopsided jail and prison terms among those who are black, Latino and poor — while making treatment for offenders a priority as he has served as Salt Lake County district attorney.



"It's no longer about simply going to court. It's about the broader issues that confront us in the criminal justice system," Gill said in the debate at the University of Utah.

In the view of Republican challenger Nathan Evershed, a toxic environment in the office has forced talented prosecutors in the district attorney's office and other employees to quit, and has held back female attorneys in particular. He said partnerships with police have headed south, public trust has plummeted, and the office is now "broken."

"I believe I'm qualified and prepared to fix it," he said.

Evershed, a homicide prosecutor in the county, and Gill, his boss, disagreed about the rate of turnover in their office, which Evershed said has risen to 25 percent.

"It's true!" a man in the audience shouted in response.

Gill, for his part, countered it is about 6 percent, saying his opponent put forward false information. Evershed said he also would make sure women in the office have a future and a voice, adding that many female prosecutors aren't in jobs that lead to promotions, but Gill said he has hired women and they remain.

Evershed criticized the unsuccessful public corruption prosecutions under Gill's tenure of former Republican Utah attorneys general John Swallow, who was acquitted, and Mark Shurtleff, whose charges were dropped, saying they have led the public to believe the charges were motivated by politics.

"That perception that's out there is quite damaging to the public's trust in this office," Evershed said.

"Our job is to try sometimes the difficult cases," Gill countered, saying not every charge leads to a conviction, "but that doesn't mean we don't prosecute the next one."

Gill emphasized his support for a November medical marijuana ballot initiative, saying he opposes recreational use but believes the proposition is "an indictment of the failure of the Legislature to listen to its citizens."

Evershed supports use of the drug for medical reasons but believes the initiative is flawed, in part because it could hinder prosecution of a driver who causes a crash and has THC, the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis, in their system.

The candidates agreed that the death penalty should be seldom-used, with Evershed saying the decision to pursue capital punishment is "gut-wrenching." Gill agreed, saying he has struggled with it, but stopped short of saying he opposes it.

"In a civilized society, this is something we need to revisit with great urgency," including at the Utah Legislature, he said.

While Evershed said some investigations of police-involved shootings have taken too long, Gill said he has made the reports public and successfully advocated for an independent board to investigate them.

Evershed emphasized that he's a political novice, having spent his career in courtrooms.

"What I will do is change the culture," he said.

Gill responded that the job is inherently political, in part because it involves negotiations with policy makers over salaries of attorneys and other employees. He said he has pushed for full

Medicaid expansion in Utah, saying low-income Utahns who don't have health coverage often wind up in the courts.

The audience in a nearly full auditorium at the S.J. Quinney College of Law at times applauded each candidate, with standing ovations for both at the end, and whistles for Evershed in particular.

The election is Nov. 6.