The two judges campaigning for a position on the Louisiana Supreme Court in District 3 met at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Monday afternoon for a debate.

Judges James “Jimmy” Genovese and Marilyn Castle, both Republican, discussed such topics as their opinions on the legal use of recreational marijuana and whether the two could put their personal beliefs for the legislation aside if it were to pass in Louisiana.

Castle, 63, acknowledged she sees a conflict between state and federal laws regarding the use of recreational marijuana.

“The (U.S.) Drug Enforcement Administration, the DEA, does not recognize marijuana as a recreational or any type of legal drug,” Castle said. "It's going to have to eventually be resolved.”

Genovese, 67, who is licensed to practice law in Colorado, one of the states that has legalized recreational marijuana, agreed with Castle that one of the major problems with the use of the drug is in the conflict between state and federal jurisdiction.

“You have this conundrum out there in which you have the federal system, which says no to marijuana,” Genovese explained. "But you have the states; three or four have come out and have said ‘yes,’ and have actually implemented the legal use of marijuana.

“The feds have not taken it upon themselves to take action, but they could do that like that, and they could come and wipe that out, because again, under our system, the United States Constitution, the federal laws will trump our state laws.”

Both Castle and Genovese said they believed marijuana is a “gateway” drug to other illegal substance abuses and expressed personal disappointment in Louisiana’s act of lessening punishments for people caught in possession of marijuana.

“As a society, we have an obligation to inform people so that they can make better choices,” Castle said. “We’re losing some of that ability to inform them of the fact that we cannot force people now to go to these classes, to learn a little bit more and to maybe make better choices.”

“I have seen,” Genovese said, “whether it’s on the juvenile side or it’s in domestic values, I have seen minors, juveniles — what use of marijuana can do to them and their families and their futures. "The use of marijuana, like any other drug, whether it’s habit-forming or non-habit-forming, it is the stepping stone to bigger and better drugs for bigger and better thrills; and it has to be suppressed, or we are going to ruin the children of the state.”

Both candidates said despite their personal beliefs, they would rule on the laws as they were established.

“I will follow what the legislature does, because it is (an) expression of the will of the people, and I respect that,” Castle maintained.

“My personal opinion has nothing to do with anything at any time, whether it’s a statute or constitutional,” Genovese said. “I will follow the law as the legislature gives it to me.”

More than 80 people attended the debate, which was hosted by UL Lafayette’s chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists and the Acadiana Press Club. Avoyelles, St. Landry, Lafayette, Vermilion, Acadia, Jefferson Davis, Calcasieu and Cameron are the eight parishes comprising District 3 that will elect a judge on Nov. 8. The winner will serve a 10-year term.

Genovese is a former district judge from Opelousas who has served on the 3rd Circuit since 2004. He attended Northwestern State University and later earned his law degree from Loyola University New Orleans.

Castle has been a district judge in the 15th Judicial District for 18 years. She earned her law degree from the Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center.