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Consentino is doing too much

OUR VIEW

No man can serve two masters. But Atkinson, N.H., Police Chief Philip V. Consentino is trying to serve three.

No man can serve two masters. But Atkinson, N.H., Police Chief Philip V. Consentino is trying to serve three.

Consentino, 62, has been the town's part-time police chief since 1978. He is also director of the town's elderly affairs program. And last week, Consentino defeated two opponents for a seat on the Board of Selectmen.

There's something quaint, in a Mayberry kind of way, about a town in which one man serves as the top law enforcer and on the community's executive board while simultaneously helping out the old folks. But it's outdated and too insular for a modern, growing community like Atkinson.

No one questions Consentino's dedication to his town and its people. His years of service ably demonstrate that. And no law is being broken -- state officials have ruled a part-time police chief can also serve as a selectman. Consentino says he will discuss but not vote on matters pertaining to the Police Department.

Legally, there is no problem. But ethically it isn't right. Consentino should give up one of his posts -- be a selectman or a police chief, but not both.

Why? Because Consentino is serving as his own boss. Upon his

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victory, Consentino recalled for our reporter "all the nights when I sat there and the selectmen would yell at me and make my life miserable. Now I can stand up and speak for the little guys and get things done."

Consentino is popular in Atkinson because of the work he does in his third post, as director of elderly affairs. He has used his officers and police vehicles to drive elders to their doctors appointments or to pick up prescriptions. Those seniors turn out to vote for him in droves, most notably when a measure to establish a full-time chief position went down in defeat. Consentino lacks the qualifications to serve as a full-time chief.

There have been a number of conflicts between Consentino and his officers. In 2000, the state Public Employee Labor Relations Board ordered Consentino to stop intimidating officers trying to form a union. The primary avenue of complaint for police officers is the Board of Selectmen. Where will they go now?

Atkinson is no longer a sleepy little town of 500. It is a growing community of 6,400. The days of one person wearing so many hats in government have passed in other communities. It is time they passed in Atkinson, too.

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