

Consentino should focus on one job at a time

In the continuing circus that is town government in Atkinson, N.H., the ringmaster is Police Chief/Elderly Affairs Director/Selectman Philip V. Consentino.

Atkinson was once a sleepy little town that could get along fine despite Consentino's antics. But now it is a growing suburban community in need of more professional leadership.

What do we mean by "Consentino's antics"? How much time have you got? Let's look at a brief list:

■ **Consentino** is the target of an ethics complaint filed by Budget Committee member Mark Acciard, who raises legitimate questions about the propriety of Consentino serving both as police chief and on the Board of Selectmen. Rather than take action that resolves the conflict of interest, Consentino engages in theatrics, asking the board to cut his salary to where it stood prior to his election as selectman. This demonstrates, Consentino says, that he is not interested in money. He wonders what he must do to "get this Mr. Acciard off my back."

■ **Last fall**, however, Consentino was very interested in money when he threatened the town with a state labor board complaint over the loss of compensation for health insurance and a uniform allowance. The chief was receiving an extra \$1 an hour in pay for not taking the health coverage offered to the police union. As chief, Consentino is not eligible to receive union benefits. It was just the way things had always been done in Atkinson that nonunion employees "rode the coattails" of the union contract. The chief got to keep his \$1 an hour.

■ **The chief himself** is the target of an unfair labor practices complaint involving his handling of a dispute with an officer on the force. Officer Gary Lorden alleges Consentino changed his shift assignments without the required notice, then retaliated against him when he complained. According to the complaint, Consentino took Lorden outside the police station and told him "the gloves were off and that he (Consentino) was going to get him (Lorden)."

■ **Because of Consentino's** dual role as police chief and director of elderly affairs, it is difficult to tell sometimes where the Police Department ends and the Elderly Affairs Department begins. Elders in Atkinson need only call the Police Department to arrange for rides to doctors, the pharmacy and other appointments. The Elderly Affairs Department is funded, in part, by a "police donation account" the chief controls. About \$10,000 comes from the police account with another \$15,000 coming from the town budget.

■ **Consentino's performance** in law enforcement could use improvement as well. Last fall, the chief railed against a proposal for a charity poker night saying that it, along with the "devil's brew" of alcohol served at a local country club, was turning his town into "Sin City." While Consentino was keeping Atkinson safe from charity events, state police were investigating an actual sports bookie operation run out of a private home in town. Consentino said the indictments were a surprise to him.

All of this suggests Consentino has his hands full with one job, let alone three. While he seems to crave being the center of attention, Consentino would do residents of Atkinson a great service by taking himself out of the spotlight. It would be best for the town for Consentino to resign some of his multiple posts and focus on one task at a time.