

Police chiefs group endorses Donelan

Have confidence in his leadership, skills for sheriff

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Recorder Staff

GREENFIELD — The Franklin County Police Chiefs Association has announced its endorsement of Christopher Donelan in his run for Franklin County Sheriff.

"We have known Chris for many years and have great confidence in his leadership and skills," said David Hastings, Gill police chief and president of the county chief's association.

"As a legislator, Chris has committed to being an active partner for the chiefs and towns we serve during these difficult economic times. We welcome that partnership and look forward to working with him as sheriff," he said.

Donelan, who was at one time a police officer in the towns of Orange and South Hadley, also worked for the probation department's Community Corrections Center in Greenfield before being elected to the state Legislature as a Democratic representative for the Second Franklin District.

While in the state House of Representatives for the past four terms, Donelan served on that body's Public Safety Committee.

Hastings said that his work in public safety at the state level has kept Donelan active in law enforcement issues and has kept him engaged with police chiefs from across the state.

"Chris' reputation and background would be an asset to the county," Hastings said. Donelan has said that he is proud to have received the support of the chiefs association.

According to Donelan, among the goals he has set, should he be elected sheriff, are the establishment of a countywide Emergency 911 call center, working with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments on emergency communications, emergency preparedness and pandemic response.

Although the Franklin County area already has a regional dispatch center run by the state police, Donelan says that he has spoken to fire chiefs and chiefs of police who are not happy with the current service.

"They have expressed frustration with the lack of local control and oversight. I have heard a lot of complaints about a lack of staff, and they are now limiting the

types of calls that they will answer. For example, they now refuse to take burn permit calls.

"When you sign up for this service, you expect them to act as your answering service and not pick and choose," he said.

A spokesman for the Shelburne Control regional dispatch center said that, at the moment, they do still take burn permit calls, but the subject came up for discussion in a meeting in Deerfield Monday night.

Donelan said that he also thinks that the sheriff's office would be an excellent organization to oversee the area's emergency radio system.

"There is both state and federal money to support and upgrade these systems, but they will only provide money for regional efforts, and I think that the sheriff's office is a good place to coordinate such efforts," he said.

According to Donelan, the sheriff's office can also work with local boards of health in order to prepare for and respond to pandemics and other health crises.

"I think that a regional approach is the best approach," he said.

Currently, Donelan said, the Worcester County Sheriff's Department has established a reverse 911 system for that county and the Town of Orange that he would like to see replicated in Franklin County.

Rick Kwiatkowski, Orange town administrator, said that they decided to go with the system employed by Worcester County because they were getting better support for funding and services in Region 2 than they were getting in Franklin County.

According to Donelan, there are many events that occur in the area, such as last winter's ice storm, that could be dealt with more efficiently if the towns acted collectively. "I am looking for new partnerships that will increase efficiency, reduce costs and improve services.

"This is the way of the future. We will only survive if we adapt to this new reality, and I intend to see Franklin County survive," he said.