

Editorial: New leadership for Ramsey County

Choi, Bostrom are best choices for county posts.

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COUNTY ATTORNEY

For the first time in 16 years, Susan Gaertner's name will not appear on the ballot for Ramsey County attorney. The veteran prosecutor made an unsuccessful bid for governor earlier this year and decided against running for a fifth term as the east metro county's chief attorney.

Voters are fortunate to have two highly qualified attorneys vying to succeed Gaertner. John Choi was the St. Paul city attorney for four years and has extensive private-practice experience in civil litigation, administrative law and government relations. His opponent, David Schultz, is a trial attorney who served as an assistant state attorney general for 11 years.

Though both are strong, capable candidates, we give a slight edge to Choi, 40, for his visionary ideas about crime prevention and strengthening the county attorney's office.

Choi has demonstrated collaborative leadership and innovative approaches to law enforcement. In recent years, we have praised his contributions twice on these pages -- first for a driver's license

diversion program and then for his involvement in "The Blueprint," a fresh approach to handling domestic-violence cases.

His priorities include tougher prosecution of gun crimes, combating domestic and gang violence, a focus on chronic and career criminals, and preventing elder abuse. Last year Choi was recognized by his colleagues as the top city attorney in North America for his innovative record.

As city attorney, Choi effectively managed St. Paul's 70-employee, \$8 million public law and prosecution office -- skills that would easily transfer to the county attorney's office. He has built a reputation as a coalition-building prosecutor and as a responsible steward of public law enforcement and prosecution dollars.

Schultz, 51, would also bring valuable legal and community experience to the county's top prosecutorial position. He has managed a private law firm about the size of the county attorney's office and has done pro bono work both locally and abroad -- including death penalty cases. In addition, Schultz has served on the boards of the Council on Crime and Justice and the Innocence Project.

We recommend Choi because of his vision for the department and his more recent experience managing a large government-oriented legal office.

Both candidates sought the DFL endorsement, and Choi received it. He is also supported by a long list of DFL politicians and a few current and former GOP

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elected officials and attorneys. Schultz also has a lengthy list of endorsements primarily from prosecutors and attorneys.

SHERIFF

The Ramsey County sheriff's race is a contest between a four-term incumbent and a seasoned St. Paul law enforcement professional.

Sheriff Bob Fletcher is seeking a fifth term as the top county cop and police chief for seven Ramsey county municipalities. Challenging him is Matt Bostrom, an assistant chief with the St. Paul police.

Though Fletcher, 55, has performed some of the duties of the office effectively, the department needs a fresh start under a more collaborative leader. We recommend Bostrom for the job.

Bostrom, a 49-year-old St. Paul native, has 28 years of experience -- much of it in management -- as a St. Paul cop. During that time, he earned a Ph.D. in public administration, authored studies on law enforcement training and became chief of the department's homeland security section.

Most important, he has the temperament and a record of working well with other government law enforcement jurisdictions. That's a much-needed skill, since police, prosecutors and the courts will have to work together more closely in the future to make the best use of limited resources.

Temperament and leadership style are our primary

concerns about Fletcher. The first time the former St. Paul officer and City Council member ran for sheriff, this editorial page expressed concern that he might stretch the office's mandates and make it too political. Those concerns were justified.

Controversy has dogged the sheriff in a variety of ways. He is not known for working collaboratively with other officials, which is reflected in the fact that the majority of County Board members support Bostrom. Earlier this year, the state Department of Administration criticized Fletcher for using government data to identify gun owners and sending them invitations to a fundraiser/shooting event. On two occasions, members of his staff were involved in mismanagement of funds or property.

Fletcher has done a decent job with the basic duties of the post -- managing the jail and water patrol and providing law enforcement for several suburban towns -- and we have endorsed him when he has had less formidable opponents. That's not the case in this election. Bostrom would bring a fresh approach to leading the department.

Bostrom won DFL endorsement and has some Republican supporters. Fletcher has support from the Ramsey County Deputy Sheriffs Association. Both candidates are endorsed by the St. Paul Police Federation.

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