

# Daily Press

## For sheriff: Morgan and Roberts in Newport News and Hampton

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The sheriffs from **Newport News** and **Hampton** are running for re-election this year, and in both cases they are being challenged by longtime deputies who had served under them. In Newport News, two additional challengers with long careers in law enforcement joined the race.

After much consideration, **we** have chosen to **endorse** the two incumbents, **Gabe Morgan of Newport News** and B.J. Roberts of Hampton. In both races, one of them very contentious, opponents have raised issues about department morale under the current administration. We are mindful of those concerns, but when **we examine** their **track records as sheriff** – eight years for Mr. Morgan, 21 years for Mr. Roberts – we believe they should continue to serve their cities in this capacity.

The decision on the Hampton race was especially difficult, because Mr. Roberts has a very strong challenger in James Adams, who spent three decades in the sheriff's office before retiring in 2009. Mr. Adams spent 16 years working under Mr. Roberts, rising to the position of chief deputy or third-in-command of the department, but he now speaks of a "lack of integrity" and a culture of intimidation in the current sheriff's administration.

In a meeting with the Daily Press Editorial Board, Mr. Adams wasn't disrespectful of his former boss but voiced concerns about morale that went well beyond the recent lawsuit filed by a group of former deputies who claimed they had been fired because they "liked" the Facebook page promoting Mr. Adams' bid for sheriff. He said if elected he would have deputies performing more law enforcement duties on the street, outside the courts and the jail.

We don't discount the possibility that morale could be an issue in the department. A sheriff who stays in place for 21 years can very easily take on the aura of a czar, and it can become difficult for subordinates to approach a well-entrenched boss about differences of opinion. If Mr. Roberts is re-elected, we hope he will consider this.

But Mr. Roberts has done an admirably efficient job running the sheriff's department, which operates the city jail, provides courthouse security, and serves subpoenas and other legal paperwork. He has brought the overcrowding at the jail to a more manageable level and developed plans that have helped to address the growing gang culture among inmates.

We believe that Mr. Adams is well qualified and could be a very good sheriff, and we would like to see some of his ideas get further consideration. But when we look at Mr. Roberts' track record we see someone who has already *done* a good job in that position for two decades and who has established strong working relationships within the city administration. That earns him our endorsement.

The campaign for sheriff in Newport News has been much more rancorous. The incumbent, Mr. Morgan, has three challengers. One, Leroy Johnson, spent 15 years in the sheriff's department and was chief deputy for three years until Mr. Morgan fired him. Mr. Johnson made strong accusations against Mr. Morgan, related to the circumstances of his termination and other issues in the sheriff's department. The other two challengers, Pricillia Burnett and Chris Wells, spent a combined 43 years in the Newport News Police Department.

In assessing the candidates, we admire the records of public service offered by Mr. Wells and Ms. Burnett, and we were intrigued by some of Ms. Burnett's ideas about vocational training for inmates. But their resumes don't match those put forward by the incumbent sheriff and the longtime deputy.

In the end, we are left to consider the allegations leveled by Mr. Johnson and adamantly denied by Mr. Morgan. Our reporters continue to investigate the charges, and if they prove to have merit we will hold the sheriff accountable on these pages. But until they are substantiated we cannot hold them against Mr. Morgan as we consider our endorsement.

We were impressed with Mr. Johnson and gave him strong consideration. But **we recognize the current Mr. Morgan's passion for the law and his commitment to making Newport News a safer place, and we see efficiency in the way he has operated the city jail.**

In this year's sheriff elections, **we are endorsing** both incumbents – **Newport News' Gabe Morgan** and Hampton's B.J. Roberts – **based on** their **track records in office.**