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10-17-2010

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Recommended Citation

Roger Williams University School of Law, "Newsroom: Kilmartin '98 Touts Police Career In Bid for RI AG" (2010). *Life of the Law School (1993-)*. 81.
https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life/81

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Newsroom

Kilmartin '98 Touts Police Career In Bid for RI AG

The Associated Press ran this profile (picked up by the Boston Globe and others) of Peter Kilmartin, RWU Law '98, the Democratic candidate for Rhode Island Attorney General.

["Kilmartin touts police career in bid for RI AG"](#) by Eric Tucker, Associated Press Writer

PAWTUCKET, R.I., Oct. 17, 2010 -- Peter Kilmartin [RWU Law '98] says he watched a man die of a gunshot wound in his first weeks as a Pawtucket police officer. He's arrested childhood friends, gone after misbehaving colleagues and consoled grieving families over a relative's death.

The Democratic state lawmaker and retired police captain leans heavily on his 24 years in law enforcement as he runs for state attorney general. As if to illustrate the point, one of his recent campaign advertisements shows him walking shoulder-to-shoulder with a line of uniformed police officers.

But he's got less experience as a full-time practicing lawyer than recent attorneys general in the state and has never worked in the office he hopes to lead. He's also well-connected to the political establishment through his two decades in the General Assembly. His Republican opponent has attacked him on both points, saying those relationships will keep him from taking a hard line on corruption and that he lacks the legal credentials for the job.

But Kilmartin, 48, says he compensates for a brief run as a lawyer with a career spent arresting criminals, sponsoring legislation and as the officer once in charge of the police department's prosecution unit.

"I've enforced the law, I've prosecuted the law, I've enacted the law, I've taught the law -- I've done it from all angles," he said.

He promises to create a public corruption unit in the attorney general's office and proposes a treatment court for military veterans accused of crimes. He proposes beefing up prosecution of gang-related crimes and, along with the Democratic nominee for general treasurer, calls for a pension fraud task force and whistleblower hot line.

He's also pushed for involvement in a federal initiative, "Secure Communities," that aims to identify illegal immigrants by matching fingerprints of arrested suspects against FBI and Department of Homeland Security records.

Kilmartin has run an aggressive campaign, winning a three-way Democratic primary that featured bitter attacks at the end. There haven't been reliably conducted polls, but he has more money in his campaign account than his four opponents in the general election, and **a recent debate at the Roger Williams University law school was crowded with supporters.**

He's vying to succeed term-limited Attorney General Patrick Lynch, a Democrat who's also faced criticism of being a political insider partly because of his earlier work as a Statehouse lobbyist. Opponents in the Nov. 2 race include Republican **Erik Wallin [RWU Law '97]**, Christopher Little of the Moderate Party and independents Robert Rainville and Keven McKenna.

The attorney general's office has vast authority in Rhode Island, which has no county district attorneys. The office is responsible for prosecuting all felonies and certain misdemeanors, represents the state in lawsuits and oversees issues including consumer protection, public utilities regulation and open records compliance.

Kilmartin was a police officer for nearly 24 years and ran the department's prosecution unit, handling misdemeanor cases and preparing investigations of felonies for review and prosecution by the attorney general's office -- a job Wallin, his leading opponent, dismisses as paper pushing.

Kilmartin earned a law degree in 1998 from Roger Williams and then served as in-house counsel for the department before retiring from the force in 2007 and joining a general practice law firm in Pawtucket.

"He's very good on his feet. He makes a good appearance, makes a good presentation," said Michael Horan, another lawyer in the practice. "He stands up there and is aggressive for our clients."

Wallin has seized on Kilmartin's legal career as a key campaign issue. He notes that Kilmartin has never tried or defended a felony case, something Wallin says he's done dozens of times as an Air Force prosecutor and a former state prosecutor. He says Kilmartin's job leading the police department's prosecution unit involved simply stapling documents together to hand to licensed prosecutors.

"His experience gets you only in the front door of the attorney general's office and no further," he said.

Kilmartin bristles at charges of inexperience.

"That shows a lack of experience and a lack of understanding of the entire judicial system," Kilmartin says of Wallin's accusation.

Kilmartin also touts his 20 years in the General Assembly, where he has held a leadership position and has successfully introduced bills that ban texting while driving and crack down on habitually dangerous drivers. He also introduced legislation last session aimed at cracking down on pay-to-play dealings between state vendors and politicians, but the bill never reached a floor vote.

Still, the record leaves him vulnerable to attacks that he's too entrenched in the political establishment.

Wallin refers to him pejoratively as a political insider. At a recent debate, Little displayed a newspaper photo of Kilmartin embracing Central Falls Mayor Charles Moreau, who authorities say they're investigating in a corruption probe. Kilmartin responded by wrapping his arm around Little, drawing laughs from the audience.

"If I didn't think he was a man of integrity, I would be concerned," said Samuel Babbitt, 81, of Providence, who has donated to Kilmartin's campaign. "My sense is he's conducted himself very well during his time in the Legislature."

Kilmartin says even though Wallin was a state prosecutor, his opponent can't match his diverse career.

"No one brings that level of experience -- that broad spectrum from beginning to end."

For full story, click [here](#).