

Candidates respond to latest DCSO discipline

By Craig Rullman
Correspondent

The turnover and formal discipline of top officials in the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office continues, with the May 18 announcement that Lt. Tim Leak has been placed on paid administrative leave for "allegations of violating sheriff's office policies."

This follows a series of recent incidents at the sheriff's office, including the firing and arrest of former Captain Scott Beard, who was accused of stealing \$200,000 from an investigative fund, and then using the money to support gifts and trips for a girlfriend, and the subsequent resignation of Captain Eric Utter, who was being investigated for conducting an affair with a subordinate.

The Nugget spoke with sheriff candidates Eric Kozowski and incumbent Shane Nelson regarding the latest disciplinary move involving leadership at the sheriff's office.

"It's troubling to me that we continue have failures in supervision and leadership,"

Kozowski said. "And it's one of the reasons I'm running. I'd hoped Shane would be the guy to fix these problems, but he seems to be continuing (former Sheriff Larry) Blanton's legacy."

In a public statement, Sheriff Nelson wrote that Leak was placed on administrative leave "after new information came to the attention of command staff in the last week."

"...it is my job to take care of business... —Sheriff Shane Nelson"

Kozowski said, "It was no secret that there were problems with his (Leak's) leadership style. He was abrasive, and unsupportive of subordinates."

The candidate, who serves as a DCSO deputy, said that he had brought these management-style issues regarding Leak to Sheriff Nelson during a personal meeting in February.

Kozowski told *The Nugget* that "numerous employees

have been asking (the sheriff) 'When are you going to do something about Leak?'"

"It is concerning and troubling that we continue to have these problems and they only get addressed when they become a crisis and he (Nelson) is forced to address them," Kozowski said.

In a written statement to *The Nugget*, Sheriff Nelson wrote regarding the February meeting with Kozowski: "As part of my taking office, I am holding meetings with all of the employees, one-on-one, for their input about the sheriff's office and how we are doing. Deputy Kozowski did meet with me in February. He only made general statements with no specific information that I could have acted on."

Nelson told *The Nugget* that Leak's placement on administrative leave is "not criminal in nature," and is unrelated to former Captain Scott Beard's recent request to change his plea in the criminal case.

It is unclear, however, if the alleged violations are

in some way related to the Beard investigation. Leak was formerly the DCSO investigative lieutenant, and served beneath fired investigative Captain Scott Beard.

The Nugget asked Sheriff Nelson if he felt the fallout investigations surrounding the Beard incident were nearing a conclusion, effectively finished, or additional discipline among the ranks could be expected.

Sheriff Nelson said, "As a servant of the people it is my job to take care of business when and if I discover problems, and I hope the citizens agree that my record over the last 10 months proves that I will take action when its necessary, and

when I find out there is an issue."

Regarding public discussion of the Leak case, the sheriff wrote, "I am disappointed that Deputy Kozowski was talking about an investigation when he does not know the facts. This shows his lack of management experience because this is the second time he has commented on an active investigation. Two months ago he made public statements about an inmate death which is the subject of pending litigation in federal court and a Department of Justice investigation. It is improper to speak on active investigations and pending litigation."

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