

Out-of-towner's Facebook remark stirs Deschutes sheriff race

By Claire Withycombe
The Bulletin

BEND (AP) — It wasn't the pork steak that Christie Gorsline had a beef with.

It was the outfit on the cook.

In a photo posted to his campaign's Facebook page July 14, Deschutes County Sheriff Shane Nelson was shown grilling pork steaks at the La Pine Frontier Days celebration. Nelson was wearing an apron festooned with the American flag over his sheriff's uniform.

"Cooking in uniform isn't exactly protecting the citizens, it's campaigning in uniform," Gorsline, a Wilsonville resident who said she learned about the ongoing sheriff's race when visiting the Sunriver area, wrote in a comment. "Does anyone else see a problem with this since his opponent is NOT allowed to do the same?"

The comment provoked further comments, first from a woman who's done publicity for Nelson's opponent, Eric Kozowski, and then responses from Nelson's campaign manager.

The exchange eventually stalled out after Nelson's campaign invited Carol White, who also commented on the story and has done outreach for Kozowski's campaign, to discuss the matter privately. White said in an email Tuesday that she declined the offer.

The Kozowski campaign made an issue of Nelson's custom of wearing a uniform to public events.

However, the sheriff said Tuesday he complies with both state law and county policy

when he wears his uniform during public appearances.

"In representing the sheriff's office as the sheriff I am within the law and policy to use the uniform in campaigning," Nelson said. "Campaigning is part of the sheriff's official capacity, and it's my duty and my desire to be elected as the sheriff and continue serving the supportive citizens of this county."

The rules on wearing a police uniform while campaigning or otherwise engaging in political activity differ for public employees who do and don't hold elected office, Nelson said.

Kozowski is a deputy at the sheriff's office, and because he is a public employee and does not hold elected office, is prohibited by Deschutes County Sheriff's Office policy from campaigning while in uniform.

Nelson said those policies regulating when employees can wear uniforms are in place to "control the message" employees send.

"The design of the policies is, we want to make sure the uniform is used for official capacity only," Nelson said. "My official capacity as sheriff does not end. My official capacity as sheriff is active all the time."

Nelson — who was appointed sheriff by the Deschutes County Commission in July 2015 to replace Larry Blanton, who retired before his term ended — holds an elected office and says he is barred neither by state law nor by sheriff's office policy from wearing a uniform publicly at campaign events.

Deschutes County's legal

counsel, Dave Doyle, said the sheriff represents the sheriff's office "at all times."

"In the context of sheriff's office policy, I informed the sheriff (and Deputy Kozowski) that the sheriff is an elected official; with very few exceptions (i.e. out of area on planned vacation) the sheriff is on duty 24/7; the sheriff represents the office at all times whether in uniform or not," Doyle wrote in an email Tuesday.

Kozowski weighed in on his campaign's Facebook page Friday.

"I have had people ask me why I don't wear my uniform at campaign events and why I don't have pictures of me in uniform on my Facebook page, website, and Instagram," Kozowski wrote. "They wonder if I am not proud of my uniform. The answer is simple — it is against Sheriff's Office policy for me to wear my uniform at campaign events or to have pictures of Sheriff's Office logos, uniforms, or equipment on a personal

website or social-media site."

Kozowski and White frame Nelson's uniform-wearing as an issue of "integrity," and Kozowski contends Nelson's practice applies a double standard.

“The design of the policies is, we want to make sure the uniform is used for official capacity only.”
— Sheriff Shane Nelson

"The cozy 'insider' boys strike again," commented White, who is also Kozowski's mother.

Kozowski said Tuesday he had not read White's comments on the photo and could not comment on her statements specifically.

"It boils down to, for me, if you're going to have a policy and you're the leader of an

organization, I believe you should follow the policies you ask all your employees to follow," Kozowski said.

Nelson reiterated Tuesday that the role of sheriff was "24/7" and differed from that of unelected public employees.

Even though Gorsline, the original commenter, cannot vote for Deschutes County officials, she says that she felt the need to post the comment because the two candidates should have a "level playing field."

Both campaigns have focused more on issues of substance facing the sheriff's office, including personnel management, transparency and fiscal accountability.

Nelson has been with the sheriff's office since the early 1990s, whereas Kozowski, a patrol deputy, joined the office in 2010 after six years as a Wallowa County sheriff's deputy.

Both are running for Deschutes County Sheriff in the Nov. 8 general election.

MAYOR: Three seats open in November election

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limits to be eligible.

Frye, the owner of the General Store at Black Butte Ranch, had served as mayor since the beginning of 2015. He was appointed to council in February 2014. His term was due to expire December 31.

City Recorder Kathy Nelson told *The Nugget* that Frye's seat will remain empty until the November election. It is possible that an elected councilor could then be appointed to step into the seat before the January swearing-in.

Three seats are up for grabs. Nelson said that no

candidates have yet filed for the November election, though a couple of people have picked up packets. To be eligible a candidate must be registered to vote in Oregon and must have been a resident of the City of Sisters for 12 months preceding the election.

Election materials may be picked up from City Recorder Nelson at City Hall, 520 E. Cascade Ave. Candidates are encouraged to obtain election materials by August 16 and must submit perfected petitions by August 30, at 5 p.m. in order to qualify for the ballot.

For more information about the application process, contact Nelson at 541-323-5213, by email at knelson@ci.sisters.or.us, or stop by City Hall at 520 E. Cascade Avenue.

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FAIR

AND RODEO

Free Shuttle Bus SCHEDULE

Wednesday, August 3rd - Sunday, August 7th

Sisters Elementary School, 611 E. Cascade Ave.

Redmond High School, 757 Rimrock Way

Leave Sisters Elementary School	Leave Redmond High School	Leave County Fair
9:30 a.m.	10:00 a.m.	3:30 p.m.
11:30 a.m.	Noon	5:30 p.m. (Last bus on Sun.)
4:30 p.m. (not on Sun.)	5:00 p.m.	10:30 p.m. (Wed./Th.)
		11:30 p.m. (Fri./Sat.)

Bend High School, 230 NE 6th St.

Leave Bend High School	Leave County Fair
9:30 a.m.	2:30 p.m.
11:30 a.m.	4:30 p.m.
3:30 p.m.	9:00 p.m.
5:30 p.m.	10:30 p.m. (Wed./Th.)
	11:30 p.m. (Fri./Sat.)

Note: Sunday August 7th Schedule

9:30 p.m.	3:30 p.m.
11:30 p.m.	5:30 p.m.

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