

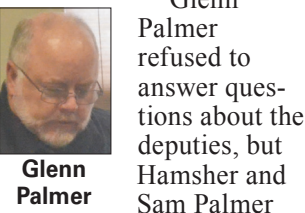
Deputizing commissioners doesn't appear to violate state laws

■ Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer refuses to answer questions

By Steven Mitchell
EO Media Group

JOHN DAY — Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer's deputization of two county commissioners does not appear to violate state nepotism and conflict of interest laws.

Grant County Commissioners Sam Palmer, the sheriff's brother, and Jim Hamsher said they have been deputized, though County Clerk Brenda Percy said no record has been filed with her for the appointments.



Glenn Palmer refused to answer questions about the deputies, but Hamsher and Sam Palmer addressed concerns about perceived conflicts of interest because the Grant County Court provides oversight of all county departments, including the sheriff's office, and sets department budgets.

Sam Palmer said he volunteers as a nurse on a tactical team with Under-sheriff Zach Mobley and is a search and rescue volunteer.

"I do both for free, and under Oregon law (that) presents no actual or perceived conflict of interest," Sam Palmer said.

State nepotism laws prohibit public employees from directly supervising relatives, but the laws do not apply for someone supervising a volunteer.

Ronald A. Bersin, the executive director of the Oregon Government Ethics Commission, said a conflict of interest only exists in the legal sense if there is a private monetary benefit for the party in question. In terms of a conflict on the sheriff's part, Bersin said a benefit for the sheriff's office budget would not amount to a private benefit for the sheriff.

"A conflict of interest only exists if there is a private pecuniary benefit to the sheriff," Bersin said. "Any budget benefit to his office would not qualify as a statutory conflict of interest, because it contains no private pecuniary benefit to the sheriff."

A conflict of interest could occur, for example, if the county commissioners voted to pay emergency operations center volunteers, including themselves, which would provide them with a private monetary benefit.

Hamsher said people concerned about how the situation presents a conflict of interest should also consider that the budget committee consists of the two commissioners, the county judge and three citizens at large, so the commissioners cannot set the budget themselves.

Hamsher said each member of the court serves as a liaison to seven county departments, and he is assigned to the sheriff's office. He said being deputized gives him more access to confidential law enforcement information that allows him to weigh in on personnel issues within the sheriff's office before they become problems.

"Jim is privileged to a lot of information and knows the goings-on of my office," Sheriff Palmer said in a Facebook post.

Hamsher said, despite the access to confidential law enforcement databases, he does not enforce the law, make traffic stops or make arrests.

Another concern regarding the role of special deputies within the sheriff's office is the liability to the county. The county's insurer, City-

county Insurance Services, said in an email forwarded to the Blue Mountain Eagle that the coverage agreement covers Grant County elected officials, employees and authorized volunteers — but they did not answer if special deputies, who are not certified by the state, would be covered in the event of a wrongful death or civil rights violation.

The Eagle emailed Sheriff Palmer requesting a phone interview with the questions provided ahead of time to allow him to prepare. The Eagle offered to record the audio and run it alongside the online article to ensure fairness and accuracy in the reporting.

Sheriff Palmer refused to answer questions about the authority of non-certified deputies when interacting with the public, about the sheriff's office's relationship with the COVID-19 emergency operations center and whether other non-certified people had been deputized.

"It has been my policy for quite some time to not respond to media requests of any sort," Sheriff Palmer replied in an email. "From what I have seen it hasn't been fair nor accurate."

Sheriff Palmer has not contacted the EO Media Group about any inaccurate information.



EO Media Group file photo

From left, County Commissioner Sam Palmer, County Judge Scott Myers and Commissioner Jim Hamsher during a court session. Hamsher and Palmer, both voting members of the court, have been deputized.

GRANDE RONDE HOSPITAL & CLINICS

DOC TALK Q&A: COVID-19 (NOVEL CORONAVIRUS 2019)

Q: Should I be traveling? Should I go out of town for the day? For the weekend?

A: Travel limitations have now been recommended by our Governor, the President, local and state Public Health Departments, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Unless your job requires it, or you have a special exception due to family needs, I urge you to stay home and practice physical distancing. Countries and US states that have initiated "no travel" recommendations have a much lower and slower spread rate of COVID-19. Limiting travel, along with good hand hygiene and physical distancing have been the best ways of preventing viral spread.

-Brian Reynolds, MD, GRH Emergency Department Physician

Your trusted GRH doctors are answering your COVID-19-related questions through this Doc Talk Q&A series. For more information on physical distancing and Oregon's coronavirus response, visit healthoregon.org/coronavirus.

The Doctor is IN

Grande Ronde Hospital

As we navigate COVID-19, we want to be sure and remind you that the safety and health of our patients, staff and community is our number one concern. We are working closely with CHD, OHA, and other partners to respond appropriately and as effectively as possible. For the latest updates from GRH, visit our web page dedicated to COVID-19 News & Updates: grh.org/covid19.

Miracle-Ear Hearing Aid Sale

Tiny Hearing Aids

On sale for a limited time!

*Tiny Digital technology delivers the clearest, most accurate sound quality available in hearing aids!***

Sale ends May 8, 2020

2 Hearing Aids for as low as

\$28!

per month†

FREE hearing tests*

Reveals if and where you need hearing assistance and is recommended for everyone over 50 years old.

Attention hearing aid wearers:

If you already wear a hearing aid (any make or model), we can help you, too! Our **FREE** computerized analysis and tune-up help keep your hearing aid working its best.*

FREE ear canal inspections*

Sometimes it's nothing more than excessive earwax. We use our state-of-the-art Video Otoscope to look inside your ear canal. You can watch on a video monitor as it happens.

Fully Digital Hearing Aid

Many Styles Available!

DON'T WAIT!

For a limited time only
Receive 2
AudioTone™ Pro
Hearing aids
Now Only...

\$28!

per month†

LIMITED-TIME OFFER. CALL TODAY!

LA GRANDE
111 Elm Street
La Grande, OR 97850
541-605-2109

BAKER CITY
2021 Washington Ave.
Baker City, OR 97814
541-239-3782

ENTERPRISE
113-1/2 Front E. Main St.
Enterprise, OR 97828
541-239-3877

*Our hearing test and video otoscopic inspection are always free. Hearing test is an audiometric test to determine proper amplification needs only. These are not medical exams or diagnoses nor are they intended to replace a physician's care. If you suspect a medical problem, please seek treatment from your doctor.
**Hearing aids do not restore natural hearing. Individual experiences vary depending on severity of hearing loss, accuracy of evaluation, proper fit and ability to adapt to amplification. Only your Miracle-Ear® representative can determine which model and options may be right for you.
†\$28 per month. Calculated at 12.99% interest for 60 months, must qualify with HealthPlan® Patient Financing.
***Pursuant to terms of your purchase agreement, the aids must be returned within 30 days of the completion of fitting, in satisfactory condition for a full refund.

To Receive the Offer Mention Code:

20AprOffer



Trusted for Over 70 Years