

SHERIFF

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a house.

- Using a county vehicle for travel while receiving reimbursement from the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training.
- Retaining pay from the city of Elgin for police services without authorization from the board of commissioners.

The exhaustive review into the number and nature of the allegations took a significant amount of time, according to the report, and involved agents interviewing more than 30 people, including Rasmussen, former sheriff’s office employees and volunteers, the county board of commissioners and Elgin city officials. Agents also obtained records from the sheriff’s office, the county board, banks and more.

Ultimately, the report states, the investigation concluded “there was insufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt the sheriff committed a criminal act with the respect to conduct that occurred within the statute of limitations.”

Rasmussen in a statement Wednesday announced, “Disgruntled employees leveled false accusations against me that were turned over to Oregon’s Department of Justice who conducted a thorough investigation of their complaints. On April 28, 2020, the DOJ cleared me.”

For some of the allegations, that assessment holds.

The justice department explained Rasmussen did not use information from a sheriff’s lien to buy a house in foreclosure. Rather, Rasmussen stated he learned of the foreclosure from a relative, and the investigation did not find the transaction “involved fraud or misuse

of process or information.”

Rasmussen had the authority to terminate the sheriff’s reserve program, according to the report, and move the program’s funds into the department’s general budget.

Rasmussen said that stemmed from internal accusations of theft from the fund but a staff review of the account found no wrongdoing. The justice department’s report also stated a “thorough analysis did not reveal sufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that any person committed theft.”

However, the investigation found five withdrawals totaling \$817.28 that lacked information about who took the money or for what purpose.

Rather than continue to put up with theft accusations concerning the account, Rasmussen explained, he dissolved the reserve program and shifted the \$15,000 from its account to the search and rescue unit, which was constructing a new building.

The report also stated witnesses claimed Rasmussen had sheriff’s office employees work on the clock in 2016 to build a wall and help with a roofing project at his home. Rasmussen denied on-duty staff performed personal services for him on the county dime, according to the report, and Rasmussen held that same stance Thursday. The justice department concluded there was a “lack of independent corroborating evidence” to accuse the sheriff of attempting or committing official misconduct or theft.

Rasmussen also requested almost \$25,000 from 2011-16 from the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training for travel reimbursement while he worked part time for the agency.

He may have used a county vehicle for traveling to the department in Salem and sought personal reimbursement or may have used his own vehicle, fueled it with a county fuel card and still sought reimbursement. The evidence was again insufficient to show official misconduct, according to the report, and insufficient “to disprove the argument the Sheriff was simply negligent in his record-keeping related to DPSST reimbursement.”

The deal with Elgin received the lengthiest examination in the report.

Elgin disbanded its police department in October 2011, and Rasmussen said on Thursday he entered into an agreement for the sheriff’s office to provide law enforcement services there. He said he worked some nights and weekends to cover the town.

Justice department agents analyzed county records showing the sheriff’s office billed Elgin for 785.75 hours of patrol activities for nine people from Oct. 14, 2011, to Feb. 3, 2012, for a total of \$19,643.75. In that 16-week span, Rasmussen billed 282.75 hours himself and received \$7,068.75 from the sheriff’s reserve program account for the work. Rasmussen’s work made up more than a third of the total billing.

He took the pay when patrolling Elgin was a service the sheriff “performed in the course of his duties as a county officer in Union County,” according to the report, and there is not evidence he remitted any payment for Elgin patrols to the county.

Rasmussen paid himself from the reserve account without approval from the county board and in violation of state law, the report states, but “the statute of limitations prohibits initia-

tion of any criminal charges related to those acts as they occurred more than six years ago.”

Rasmussen said as sheriff he makes executive decisions all the time, and entering a deal with Elgin was no different.

“It wasn’t this big thing,” he said, adding he was not aware at the time he needed the approval of the county board.

Rasmussen is seeking a fifth term as sheriff and faces three challengers in the election.

Sheriff’s deputy and school resource officer Cody Bowen of La Grande said he wants people to know there was an investigation but he would not comment further.

Bill Miller of Elgin worked for the sheriff’s office for 13 years — all under Rasmussen — before resigning in 2018 and taking a parole and probation officer job with Union County Community Corrections. Miller said he was staying out of the discussion about the investigation.

“Not my circus, not my monkey,” he said.

And Shane Rollins of Cove said Rasmussen has a duty to address the people of the county about the investigation. The sheriff is a professional position, he said, and the person in that role needs to be a professional.

Rasmussen said the report does him no favors in his reelection bid, but he

stood by his work as sheriff. He said when he came into the office he instituted higher standards and professional policing, and he aims to continue that work. Yet, if he wins, he may face another challenge.

The Department of Public Safety Standards and Training, that agency Rasmussen sought travel reimbursement from, oversees police training and certification in Oregon and investigates law enforcement for ethics violations. Serious enough offenses can lead to officers losing their certifications and thus their ability to work in Oregon in law enforcement.

Rasmussen said he was confident he would prevail in any ethics complaint.

PLANTS

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were seeded and raised with the help of close to 300 seventh- and eighth-graders.

The students have not been able to assist with the project since March 14 when all public schools in Oregon were closed.

Nickerson, though, is keeping students updated on the sale and providing information on the art of gardening during daily distance-learning science classes. Nickerson and Kevin Lair, also a La Grande Middle School science teacher, have been doing almost all of the work raising the plants since the shutdown. Students eagerly stepped forward to care for plants in the school’s greenhouse in previous years, something they are could not do this years.

“Every day students would be helping before and after school,” Nickerson said.

The absence of student help has meant Nickerson and Lair have had to do all of the transplanting of plants into larger containers and many other projects.

Still, Nickerson looks forward to the greenhouse work, noting gardening has a calming effect, especially welcome in today’s uncertain times. She added preparation of the sale is having a positive influence on many.

“It gives people something good to talk about,” the LMS science teacher said.

This year’s sale will be different from those of years past when customers often packed the school’s greenhouse. The greenhouse, because of social distancing rules, will be closed to the public and instead buyers need to preorder plants and pick them up at a site outside the greenhouse. They will be able to make donations online or leave them in a drop box.

Individuals can obtain

additional information about the sale by calling Nickerson at 541-663-3481 or emailing her at kathy.nickerson@lagrandesd.org.

La Grande Middle School principal Kyle McKinney said keeping the plant sale going despite the COVID-19 crisis will make it easier for the tradition to continue in the future. He explained a portion of the money from the sale always goes to buying supplies for the next year’s sale.

“It is self-sustaining,” McKinney said.

The principal said without money from this year’s sale, the school would have had to find money from other sources to conduct a plant sale in 2021.

McKinney said the plant sale has become an iconic fixture at La Grande Middle School.

“A lot of people in the community rely on our plant sale,” he said.

When the state announced that public schools would be closed for the rest of the spring, McKinney said he received phone calls and emails from people asking if the plants still would be available.

McKinney said the plant sale has helped many students learn lessons about gardening and botany that are long remembered. Former students have told him they credit what they know about transplanting and pruning to what they learned while helping prepare the plant sale.

The principal said the plant sale is a fixture in part because the sign promoting it on Fourth Street, where the school is located, is so visible and on one of the busiest streets in La Grande.

The sale’s popularity, McKinney said, is also a reflection of the hearts of those who live here.

“Ultimately,” McKinney said, “the community likes to support our schools.”

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BILL MILLER FOR SHERIFF



2020 UNION COUNTY SHERIFF

CANDIDATE QUALIFICATIONS CHART

Candidate Name	William L. Miller	Boyd R. Rasmussen	Cody M. Bowen	Shane A. Rollins
DPSST Number	37647	30542	50531	None
Military Service	USAF	None	None	USMC
College Degree	EOU-BS	EOU-BS	None	None

OREGON DPSST CRIMINAL JUSTICE CERTIFICATIONS

Police Officer Basic	YES	YES	YES	NO
Police Officer Intermediate	YES	YES	NO	NO
Police Officer Advanced	YES	YES	NO	NO
Police Officer Supervisory	YES	YES	NO	NO
Police Officer Management	NO	YES	NO	NO
Police Officer Executive	NO	YES	NO	NO
Corrections Officer-Basic	YES	NO	NO	NO
Parole & Probation Officer-Basic	YES	NO	NO	NO
Total DPSST Training Hours	2420.80	2155.25	1213.50	NONE

To view complete training records go to Oregon Criminal Justice Information Records Inquiry System (CJIRIS)

http://www.oregon.gov/dpsst/sc/pages/iris.aspx

Look me up on Facebook: Bill Miller For Union County Sheriff

Email me: billmillerforucsheriff@gmail.com

Paid for by Committee to elect Bill Miller, Sheriff. Jared Rogers - Treasurer, 73001 Palmer Junction Rd., Elgin, OR 97827