

Court

Continued from A1

Nelson was former Deschutes County Sheriff Larry Blanton’s chosen successor, appointed by a vote of the County Commission upon Blanton’s retirement in September 2015.

Blanton stepped down amid several scandals involving his senior leadership team, though he and Nelson largely avoided direct blame.

In March 2016, Kozowski, then a 14-veteran of law enforcement, announced he was running against Nelson in the 2016 election, telling voters that widespread problems with workplace culture and harassment had continued under the new sheriff’s leadership.

A month before the election, Kozowski, who had no record of discipline or misconduct, said in a letter to the county legal department that he and his supporters were being targeted for retaliation.

Kozowski ultimately lost the race by 10%. Fourteen months later, he was gone, fired by Nelson for office policy violations, including a finding Kozowski failed to log a report in an instance when he was required to, which Kozowski denies, and a finding he declined to arrest the subject of a warrant.

Kozowski said he was following the direction of a supervisor.

Another disciplinary strike against Kozowski received media attention at the time. The deputy was dinged for wearing his uniform during a televised debate in the sheriff’s race. Nelson was also in uniform but said that as elected sheriff, he was “always on duty.”

In a short public statement announcing Kozowski’s firing, Nelson said, “We’ve had a number of people in the past who have degraded the public’s trust. I don’t want those people working here. I am committed to the highest level of standards and professionalism in this office.”

In February 2018, following his termination, Kozowski filed his lawsuit in federal court alleging Nelson violating his First Amendment rights along with Oregon’s law protecting whistleblowers.

Kozowski named Nelson and sheriff’s Capt. Paul Garrison separately in the suit. Garrison conducted the initial internal investigations into Kozowski.

Kozowski filed a complaint with the Oregon Department of Justice, but department investigators were “unable to corroborate” his claims. Kozowski did get a victory when

Deschutes County District Attorney John Hummel declined to add Kozowski’s name to the local “Brady” list of police officers found to have been deceptive in the past, finding that Kozowski had not lied nor misled.

The Deschutes County Commission in consultation with Nelson, declined to settle with Kozowski numerous times. If the county is found liable in the case, payment would come from the county’s risk fund. If the liability exceeds the county’s rate of self-insurance — \$1 million — the county’s insurance company would pay the portion in excess, according to county attorney David Doyle.

Kozowski and his Bend-based attorney, Michael McGean, declined to comment for this article.

Nelson was reelected in November, defeating Bend Police officer Scott Schaier, who also criticized Nelson for lagging behind the times on crucial issues like representation and employee morale.

Several months after the 2016 election, the sheriff’s policy handbook was revised to directly state that the sheriff may appear at election events while in uniform.

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Nicole Bales/The Bulletin

The Redmond School Board met Wednesday for a special meeting to discuss the governor’s mask mandate.

Redmond

Continued from A1

The packed auditorium at Redmond High School erupted in cheers and clapping after Summers read the resolution that demanded Brown return decision making to local authorities.

“As a parent, I feel like my rights have been stripped, and it was, ‘shut up and do what we tell you,’” Summers said. “And that doesn’t go over very well.”

“There are ramifications for this. I fully understand that,” he said. “I’m not trying to withhold somebody’s options. I’m trying to add one more.”

The board voted 4-1 in favor of considering the resolution. Liz Goodrich was the lone vote in opposition and said the ramifications “are very serious.”

“You’re asking people to put their licenses on the line,” Goodrich told Summers after the board was told noncompliance could be met with fines and loss of licensure for administrators and teachers. “You’re asking people to put personal liability on the line. That is a lot.”

“There are parts of this mandate that I’m not happy with either,” said Goodrich as she was heckled by the audience. “That said, I believe the masks are a part of the puzzle to keep our kids in school in person in a safe and healthy way.”

She said she appreciates Summers putting the resolution together and asked that they work together to craft it. The board however, chose Chairwoman Shawn Hartfield to work with Summers.

The board discussed how to proceed with summer school programs in the meantime. Jill Cummings, a new member to the board, asked whether summer school should be canceled since the board does not have

time to make a decision regarding masks.

Superintendent Charan Cline shook his head. He said that although the mandate was effective Aug. 2, he delayed enforcement until the board could meet. He said masks would be required, effective Thursday.

“The board doesn’t have to do anything,” Cline told the board. “The order’s in place. The regulations are in place. We just simply have to start enforcing. The board doesn’t actually have the authority to not enforce it.”

Angry parents left the auditorium, some saying they would not bring their children to summer school the next day.

The Redmond School District began its summer school programs in early August, recommending masks instead of requiring them. Other Central Oregon school districts, including Crook County, Culver and Jefferson County, also rejected the mandate when it was announced but have softened their tone.

Crook County School District was met with backlash during a meeting on Monday after announcing it would “acknowledge” the mask mandate. The school board, however, said the mandate would not be enforced.

A Jefferson County School District spokesperson told The Bulletin on Thursday that it will comply with the mandate. Culver School District Superintendent Stefanie Garber said the school board will discuss whether or not to comply during a meeting in late August.

Throughout Central Oregon, venue spaces for school board meetings have moved from classrooms to auditoriums as attendance grows. While debates over masking have taken

center stage, the issue often gets overshadowed by parents and others protesting teachings related to race and gender.

The Redmond School Board’s discussion on the mask mandate Wednesday followed presentations and discussions with Colt Gill, the director of Oregon Department of Education, and Deschutes County Public Health officials.

Throughout the meeting, the audience laughed at, talked over and heckled Gill and local public health officials while they appeared virtually to present data, information and answer the board’s questions.

Phrases including, “Fake data,” “cite your source,” “how much are they paying you?” and “we’re not listening,” were shouted from the crowd. “The vaccine does nothing,” someone else shouted. “It’s poison,” another added.

During public comment, people who spoke in favor of masks were also heckled. Board members, teachers and other parents opposed to masks talked about the toll wearing masks have had on students’ mental health.

Barry Branaugh, a long-time teacher in the Redmond School District, said that while he agrees students’ mental health has suffered, he thinks part of the blame lies with the adults.

“As a community, we have not sent consistent messages as to why we make these hard choices,” Branaugh said. “I believe kids’ resiliency will come forward if the adults can unify around a message that, while we don’t like having to wear masks, we’re going to because we want to protect them and our community and then we model that behavior.”

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Homeless

Continued from A1

The decision marks an unprecedented investment in addressing homelessness for the city of Redmond. Other local governments, like the city of Bend and Deschutes County, have made similar investments with rescue plan funding as the homeless population continues to grow in Central Oregon.

But half of the Redmond City Council pushed back at a meeting Tuesday, instead advocating for all of the money to go toward the public safety facility.

About \$450,000 will go to Bethlehem Inn, a nonprofit that is converting a hotel into a high-barrier homeless shelter, which means someone needs to be sober to stay there. This amount will match \$450,000 given by Deschutes County to help close a funding gap for the shelter, which is primarily funded through the state-funded Project Turnkey grant.

Another \$300,000 will go to Shepherd’s House Ministries, a nonprofit seeking to open a low-barrier shelter in the city.

The rest of the money will go toward the Oasis Village, a project in part orchestrated by the nonprofit Jericho Road to create a managed camp where people can legally camp.

The proposal to use a portion of the rescue plan funding came from Councilor Ed Fitch, who was one of three councilors on a subcommittee that helped decide how the money should be allocated. He argued it was crucial to invest in solutions for homelessness before the problem gets bigger.

Fitch also considers it a moral issue.

“Each meeting we start with a prayer...if there was any message Jesus Christ conveyed to us, it’s that we have compassion for those who are less fortunate than we are,” Fitch said Tuesday.

But the two other councilors on the subcommittee, Shannon Wedding and Kristanna Clark-Endicott, argued all of the rescue plan funding should go toward the public safety facility.

Clark-Endicott, who is married to Mayor George Endicott, said in the meeting that

the root cause of homelessness is mental illness and drug addiction, and that those are issues the county is funded to address, not the city.

“If the city uses city-allocated funds to solve county-assigned issues, is the county going to pay to solve city-assigned issues?” she said.

But James Cook, a member of the Homeless Leadership Coalition of Central Oregon, pushed back against Clark-Endicott’s premise in the public comment section of the meeting, saying people become homeless for a diverse set of reasons.

“That’s a lie. It’s wrong, and it’s an easy excuse to try to not accept responsibility for people in this community,” Cook said.

In the end, the council voted 4-3 to move forward with Fitch’s recommendation, with Wedding, Clark-Endicott and the mayor voting against.

Endicott said he supported Bethlehem Inn’s project, but did not “feel strongly” about the rest, without elaborating on why.

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Keychain

Continued from A1

Ten separate allegations made by members of the public in early May were determined to be either “unfounded” or “not sustained,” according to the chief’s findings report.

Capt. Nick Parker, head of the patrol bureau, went a step further in a letter to Krantz, declaring Spano “exonerated” of the keychain-related allegation.

Krantz did, however, write that while conducting the investigation, he encountered departmental policies in need of revision, including those relating to uniforms, outside employment and social media.

Though its roots are in ancient Greek history, the term “MOLON LABE” has been used more recently as a defiant battle cry by groups including Second-Amendment supporters and U.S. military Special Forces, according to the investigative report written by Bend Police Lt. Juli McConkey.

McConkey’s investigation included consultation with local military recruiters who confirmed the patches visible in Spano’s vehicle in social media posts were consistent with those often exchanged and collected by military members, her report states.

McConkey interviewed Spano on June 2. They were joined by his attorney, Angela Lee, and the head of city human resources, and the Bend Police Association.

Spano said in the interview he’d used the keychain while on-duty for at least 11 years, in Bend and at his previous job with the Medford Police De-

partment, where he worked from 2008 to 2015. He said he wears it to honor his oaths to the military and law enforcement and denied that it represents any antigovernmental sentiment.

The internal investigation caused Spano to learn the phrase has been “hijacked” by extremists like the Three Percenters and white supremacists, McConkey wrote.

As a result of the investigation, Spano no longer uses the keychain, according to the report.

Parker writes that although Spano did not receive formal approval to display his keychain, his supervisors were aware of its existence and did not discourage him from wearing it while on duty. Parker acknowledges that had he known more about the term “MOLON LABE,” he might have acted differently.

“Unfortunately, I did not take more care in this situation while researching what the phrase signified and appropriately apply the uniform policy,” Parker wrote. “Had I done that then this situation could have potentially been avoided.”

McConkey also found no evidence to substantiate claims Spano violated policies with a private business he’s established in Oregon, Sage Steppe Outdoors, with a listed address of the Bend Police station.

In his findings report, Krantz ordered that Spano receive a debriefing on the department’s rules for maintaining outside employment. He further wrote the department should develop rules for use of the police headquarters address for personal businesses.

McConkey further found no evidence to support a complaint Spano violated policy by using a notebook reading, “People to Kill” on the front, seen on his personal Instagram page.

The notebook was sold containing blank pages and determined to be satirical. Inside the notebook, Spano had written notes for an upcoming class he was to teach, according to McConkey.

The claims against Spano were submitted by members of the activist group Central Oregon Peacekeepers. Deschutes County District Attorney John Hummel has accused Krantz of harboring an “obsession” with the Peacekeepers, by singling out the group’s members for arrests and enhanced surveillance because they’re critical of police.

On May 1, Spano responded to a trespassing call at the Les Schwab Tire Center on Franklin Avenue in Bend. During the call, Peacekeeper Mike Satcher was cited for trespassing, according to the investigative report. He did not “accept” the citation when Spano placed it in his lap.

As Satcher left the area, he made a comment about Spano’s keychain, the report states.

Satcher was never charged with the offense by the Deschutes County District Attorney’s office.

The Peacekeepers posted a photo on Facebook showing Spano in uniform during the incident at Les Schwab.

On May 3, the complaints were filed with Bend Police. They included the photo of Spano as well as others pulled

from his social media pages suggesting he supported extremist groups or ideologies. They included photos of patches on the dashboard of his private vehicle and the “People to Kill” notebook.

A call to the Peacekeepers was not returned Thursday.

After the posts, Peacekeepers submitted complaints to Hummel. Spano responded in a letter to Hummel defending himself and highlighting past actions that he says demonstrates his fairness as an officer, such as when he arrested a fellow military veteran for an alleged race-based assault at the Red Robin in Bend.

“All I would ask is just like those of us that perform the duties of Police Officers, be a finder of fact, don’t be influenced due to social pressure, and represent the community you serve with pride and not prejudice,” Spano wrote to Hummel.

Spano did not return a call

and an email seeking comment.

Spano was given a contingent job offer by the Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office though he is still going through the hiring process, sheriff’s spokes-

man Sgt. Jayson Janes confirmed Thursday.

If given a formal offer, Spano would start Sept. 1, Janes said.

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