

Spreen vs. board

Umpteenth bout over contracts

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

Republican commissioners kid about "venting our spleen."

And the Democratic sheriff gives them plenty of opportunity.

Another surprise move Thursday by Sheriff Johannes Spreen turned what was expected to be a quiet Oakland County Board of Commissioners meeting into a spitting match.

Angry with Spreen's threatened refusal to sign law enforcement contracts which the board had authorized with township, some commissioners hit back. They wouldn't approve two new positions he requested.

BOTH SIDES finally gave in after a hassle which some commissioners called a "circus," "an elementary playground" and "playing games."

"This group — it's getting worse all the time," said Alexander Pestinoff, D-Southfield.

"All these threats back and forth. We should do what we feel is fair and equitable and let the sheriff take his own action."

Commissioner John Calandro, R-Nov, agreed, suggesting that County Executive Daniel Murphy get a court writ to enforce the contracts.

"Let's calm down. We can resolve this without it being a major controversy," added Calandro.

PREPARED TO add two sheriff's staffers, Oakland County commissioners listened intently as Spreen urged approval of new jail administrator Stephen Saunders III and a training officer.

To their surprise, Spreen then chastised them for not returning five patrol officers from jail duty to road patrol status.

Upset about the failure of townships to hire more officers, the sheriff asked the board to discuss services provided to townships. Spreen then announced he would not sign township contracts for law enforcement services until then.

"Townships must agree to pay as they grow. Most of the townships, under contract, have recognized the need to expand," he told the commission, adding that Independence and Orion have not complied.

"When backup and fill-in is provided as part of township contracts, costs are spread countywide. This should not be if we are to continue in contract policing."

Spreen said national standards call for one officer per 1,000 residents. Independence has added one deputy, bringing it to seven for 23,000 residents. Orion with 19,500 residents has six deputies.

BREAKING UP the board meeting for a heated discussion, the commissioners asked Spreen to explain.

The sheriff said townships get excellent coverage and service, but some staffs are below par. He pin-

pointed Orion and Independence, charging that they are unwilling to meet him half way.

When pressed, the sheriff agreed to sign contracts for eight of the 10 townships to which the county provides law enforcement service. Those are Addison, Ayr, Broadton, Commerce, Highland, Lyon, Oakland and Springfield.

"I'd like to contract with them because they are working with me. But I suggest the other two (Independence and Orion) get their own police forces," Spreen said.

COMMISSIONER James Lannell, R-Royal Oak, said a state attorney general opinion requires Spreen to fulfill the contracts.

Spreen retorted, "I'm not saying I don't want to; just that I want serious discussion. You have forced me into this by laying off 27 deputies," retorted the sheriff, who kept saying he was holding the contracts in abeyance.

Board Chairman Richard Wilcox, R-Ortonville, countered by saying commissioners would "hold in abeyance" the two sheriff's positions to be approved that day.

"That's politics. That's getting even," said Spreen.

COMMISSIONER Marilyn Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills, called the sheriff's actions "very unfair and irresponsible."

"I'm tired of you standing up at the podium and berating this commission. We cannot give you the whole county budget to do with as you please," she said angrily.

"I'm one Democrat in this county and trying to do a job. I'm tired of the spot Republicans put me in," countered Spreen.

"I'm sorry I ever ran for this job in this county." "You have an opportunity to correct that this November," said Gosling, referring to the fact the sheriff is due to seek re-election this year.

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