

Roache defends his management choices

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Sheriff-elect Jim Roache formally introduced his management team at a press conference yesterday, and used the occasion to defend himself against critics who contend that he has fallen down on a campaign promise to bring outsiders into the management of the problem-plagued Sheriff's Department.

Roache's undersheriff and all three of his assistant sheriffs, including one who will serve for only 90 days in an interim capacity, come from within the department and were promoted through the ranks by outgoing Sheriff John Duffy.

"I'm a little bit disappointed," said San Diego civil-rights lawyer Michael Crowley. "I thought we were going to go outside (for top management). I thought we needed professionalism that wasn't tainted."

Assistant Sheriff Jack Drown, who lost to Roache in the election Nov. 6, lauded Roache's choice of retired Assistant Sheriff Cliff Powell as interim assistant sheriff in charge of jail operations.

But Drown also charged that Roache "has fallen down on his campaign promise to go outside. Every one of the people he's named to these positions are longstanding members of the department who have been the beneficiaries of John Duffy's appointments and assignments."

Drown said he considered the elevation of Cmdr. Mel Nichols to assistant sheriff in charge of training and administrative services a wise choice.

Both Nichols and Powell supported Drown during the election, and their appointments have somewhat mollified feelings among the rank and file that Roache would be vindictive against Drown's supporters.

A number of deputies, however, said they were still waiting and watching to see what Roache will do when he and his new team take office on Jan. 7.

Roache, meanwhile, questioned whether there was really dissension among the troops, most of whom supported Drown in the election.

"I have not seen this image of dissension, fragmentation, real reservations and the strong possibility of obstructionist activities," he said. "What I'm finding is exactly the opposite. If, in fact, there is such an element, I think it's very, very small."

Roache's other two appointments, Capt. Jay LaSuer for undersheriff and Capt. Maudie Bobbitt for assistant sheriff in charge of law-enforcement services, were Roache's allies during the election.

Both also have been criticized, Bobbitt for her ties to jail problems and LaSuer for allegedly creating racial tensions in Poway.

Roache, however, said anyone he promoted would be criticized.

Bobbitt is believed to be the second woman statewide to be elevated to such a high position in a sheriff's department.

Having a woman assistant sheriff should give other women in the department a role model, said Lt. Lorrie Bird, a longtime friend of Bobbitt's. "It's obviously an important stride forward for women in law enforcement."

Retired Cmdr. John Galt, who supported Drown during the election, said he believed it was time for "everyone to get behind Jim Roache, because he is the sheriff now." He added:

"I think Jim's made some good appointments. I was pleased to see Cliff Powell join the jail team, because Cliff is an outstanding administrator."

Galt also said that LaSuer had received a "bad rap" when he came under fire for several racially sensitive incidents that occurred at the Poway substation where LaSuer is captain.

Galt noted that LaSuer was the architect of a program at Poway under which deputies donated used equipment to the San Felipe Police Department in Mexico. "Jay is a long, long way from being a racist," Galt added. "It bothers me that there's so much rancor."

LaSuer, meanwhile, said he plans to meet with Roberto Martinez, head of the U.S.-Mexico Border Program, to discuss Hispanic concerns.

"I'm sure after we meet there won't be a problem," he added.

Also yesterday, Roache announced his transition team, comprised of 41 business leaders and community activists, including Clyde Romney, former chief of staff to Rep. Ron Packard; Ray Hoobler, former San Diego police chief; and Jim Ellis, former state senator.

San Diego attorney Everett Bobbitt, husband of Maudie Bobbitt, was named to the team the day after the election. He said he would head a personnel committee that would look into longstanding problems in the way the department operates.

Roache said the transition team would meet in December for organizing and briefing sessions to develop assessments and comments on Sheriff's Department activities.

"However, I intend to keep an open ear at all times," Roache said. "My style will include an openness to fresh ideas, a willingness to see the bad and the good in our department, and a determination to earn the respect of all the citizens in this county."

Credit: Staff Writer

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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