

EDC sheriff told to slash budget by \$4 mil.



Dwindling ammunition supplies at El Dorado Sheriff's Office could affect training. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County supervisors appear to be putting the hiring of a public information officer and swimming pool over fully funding the sheriff's department.

There is a \$7 million budget deficit for the fiscal year that starts July 1. Instead of recommending cuts, the board last week told acting CEO Larry Combs what to spend money on that is not currently in the budget.

On April 26 the electeds agreed they want a PIO, road

maintenance and to pay the debt for the new public safety facility, along with money for Placerville's pool and other items.

It's Combs' job to appease the electeds.

But at no time during that meeting was the possibility of slashing the sheriff's budget by \$4 million brought up. In fact, Combs still has not spoken directly with Sheriff John D'Agostini, even though the sheriff has requested a meeting. It was an analyst in the CAO's office who told the finance guy in the sheriff's department about the cuts.

"We have not increased anything in the six years I've been here," D'Agostini told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It seems every time there is a shortfall, they ask for the money from us. I am tired of being the Bank of El Dorado County."

Combs also isn't returning *Lake Tahoe News*' call. And without information from that office it's unknown how the entire deficit will be erased, let alone money found for what the supervisors want to fund. (Legally, the county has to have a balanced budget. Using reserves is not a sustainable, long-term solution.)

"I'm hoping the CAO's office gives me a call and we can work this out instead of them digging their heels in," D'Agostini said.

Supervisor Sue Novasel also didn't respond to an inquiry from *LTN* about the sheriff's budget and what her priorities are for the overall budget.

Cutting positions would be one option for the sheriff. Each position, on average, is about \$125,000/year. This includes all benefits. This coming year he wanted to hire a detective, technicians and deputies to the tune of \$1.6 million. Not funding those still leaves a \$2.4 million hole.

The sheriff's department had to make cuts for this fiscal year. Ammunition is one thing that is not fully funded, so the sheriff no longer has the supply on hand that he prefers. Regular trainings and certifications require the officers fire their weapons.

Part of his request for the upcoming fiscal year was funding to get the stock of bullets back to a level he deems responsible.

"I'm frustrated right now," D'Agostini said.

Most years the budget is being worked on almost year-round. Not so this year. Department heads are usually notified at the beginning of the year about potential cuts. This gives enough time for thoughtful decision-making. Combs didn't employ this strategy. It doesn't help that Combs works part time, lives in Auburn and is essentially a temp worker.