The Changing of the Guards

By Chuck Goudie

January 13, 2005 — There are new charges of political favoritism against Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich and the Illinois State Police. Official complaints were lodged by some state police officers in the wake of the I-Teams "Changing of the Guards" reports the past few months.

Dozens of Illinois State Police officers are alleging that Governor Rod Blagojevich put politics ahead of police protection. Two former top officials of the governor's bodyguard unit filed discrimination complaints for what they say happened when Blagojevich came into office.

"I was part of the housecleaning for an incoming Democratic administration and we were part of the old regime, as some people viewed us, and although we had nothing to do with politics, we were given the boot simply because of who we were affiliated with," said Jim Drozdz.

Jim Drozdz was the administrative officer for Governor George Ryan's security detail. He holds advanced college degrees in police administration; a law degree and a doctorate in education and maintained a spotless work record. He was stunned two years ago when, under the newly-elected Rod Blagojevich, he was involuntarily transferred from the state executive protection unit.

"I found myself without a job, I was reassigned involuntarily to the Critical Incident Response Command. Essentially, what I was... a glorified janitor is what I was. I counted boxes, I washed cars, I moved trailers, I loaded trailers, I unloaded trailers," said Drozdz.

Last November, after seeing I-Team reports about misconduct and mismanagement in Governor Blagojevich's bodyguard unit, Drozdz filed a discrimination complaint with the Illinois State Police against former EPU commander Tom Ceja, and First Deputy Director Doug Brown.

In the complaint, Drozdz claims that he was recently told by a high ranking state police official that he had been "transferred (two years ago) for reasons bearing solely on political affiliation."

"I don't see anybody in the director's office stepping up and taking responsibility for this mess, I think if anyone's responsible for them, for this, it occurred on their watch, and something ought to be done in their office," said Drozdz.

"I think you've seen some of the changes," said Illinois State Police Director Larry Trent.

Thursday, Trent and Governor Blagojevich said they have cut the size of the bodyguard unit and transferred the commanders and 40-percent of the staff, but neither Trent nor Blagojevich seemed to know anything about Jim Drozdz' political discrimination complaint even though it was filed 6 weeks ago.

Miserable in his police job, last summer Drozdz decided to enter the race for Hamilton County state's attorney. He won the election and was sworn in as county prosecutor December 1.

Drozdz now works in Carthage, a quiet county seat in western Illinois. He is on an official leave of absence from the Illinois State Police. Drozdz won as a Republican, beating a two term Democratic incumbent. That may be the ultimate irony-- Rod Blagojevich, the democratic governor, inadvertently helped elect a Republican.

New job or not, Drozdz says his boyhood dream of being a state trooper, came to an unexpected early end.

"EPU has given the state police a black eye and it reflects negatively on the folks who are out there everyday fighting the good fight, doing the job and that's very sad to see," said Drozdz.

Drozdz says he has been questioned by state police internal affairs investigators but has heard nothing from them.

Also tonight, the I-Team learned that the bodyguard unit commander when Blagojevich came into office filed a political

discrimination complaint. A state police spokesman would not comment on either, saying they are personnel matters.

ABC 7 also learned the union representing state police bodyguards has filed grievances on behalf of two dozen officers who were transferred by Governor Blagojevich shortly after our investigation.

You can see the ABC7 report by clicking on the video icon above. You will need Windows Media Player to view this video. You can get it FREE by clicking here. **NOTE: Video clips will only be available for 5-days from the date they were created. ALSO: Video clips will play in a separate window on Mac OS X machines, you may also see a video help screen.**

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