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St. Louis County police chief announces retirement

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CLAYTON (KMOX News) -- After enduring months of public speculation regarding his job security, St. Louis County police chief Jerry Lee announced his retirement on Friday.

He vows to leave the department no later than August 1st.

Rumors over the Chief's future first began to swirl after a disagreement between the Chief and County Executive Charlie Dooley over raises for rank-and-file police officers.

Almost exactly a month ago, KMOX asked Chief Lee if he thought his job was in danger.

"I don't know that they're trying to get rid of me," Lee said on February 26th. "I'm [still] the chief of police and I have not announced my retirement."

But at the same time, County Executive Dooley was delayed for months by the County Council in his efforts to replace two members of the Board of Police Commissioners. Council members cited apprehension that the new appointees would likely vote to remove Chief Lee from office.

On February 17th, KMOX asked the County Executive whether he'd promise not to seek Chief Lee's dismissal in exchange for council confirmation of the two candidates, Calzona Hall and John Saracino.

"I can't speak to that," Dooley said. "I'm just saying that right now it's up before the Council."

Neither Dooley nor nominee Hall have denied the allegations when pressed further, councilmembers say. The appointments have been stalled since their January 27th introduction to the council.

A statement released by Dooley's office late Friday reads, "I congratulate Chief Lee on the pending conclusion of a distinguished law enforcement career. I salute him and thank him for his dedication and commitment to public safety. I wish him nothing but the best in his retirement."

'I LOVE MY JOB'

In that late-February interview, KMOX asked the Chief if he had been contemplating retirement.

"No. I love my job and the people. I love the citizens of St. Louis County and as long as we can make it a safe place to live and work in, that's my goal," Lee replied.

The 60-year-old joined the St. Louis County police department in 1970. When former chief Ron Battelle retired in 2004, Lee was promoted to the top job over three other finalists. The next chief will probably be promoted from within, according to a release announcing Lee's retirement.

"At some point in my career I'm sure I'll retire, but right now i'm just very happy with what I do," Lee said in February. "I want to continue to do the job."

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