



Lee suspended with pay

JP hires noted lawyer

By John Grant Emeigh of The Montana Standard | Posted: Wednesday, February 1, 2012 12:00 am

A Butte justice of the peace facing a torrent of felony drug charges has picked up a prominent Montana lawyer to help in his defense.

Billings attorney Cliff Edwards told The Montana Standard Tuesday that he has agreed to defend Bob Lee against the dozens of charges accusing him of illegally obtaining prescription drugs in two counties. Edwards said he chose to represent Lee because he's known him a long time and considers him a friend.

"I have great respect for Judge Lee," Edwards said. "I consider Bobby a friend and an honorable man, and I'm going to get to work on his case."

State prosecutors filed 12 counts of fraudulently obtaining dangerous drugs against Bob Lee Friday in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County, and filed 22 more Monday in Jefferson County.

Edwards said he couldn't comment on the charges because he hasn't had time to review them.

Lee was suspended with pay on Monday from his position as Butte justice of the peace, according to Edwards.

Calls to the Montana Judicial Standards Commission Tuesday to confirm Lee's status weren't returned by deadline.

County Attorney Eileen Joyce said she hadn't received official word about Lee's status as of Tuesday afternoon. She said that she is concerned about finding a substitute to fill Lee's position if he is suspended or resigns.

If Lee is suspended with pay, Joyce said they will have to determine if the county has enough money budgeted to fund a temporary replacement.

"I don't know if we have the ability to pay two people for the same job," Joyce said.

Butte-Silver Bow County has two justices of the peace who each earn about \$66,000 annually.

Lee is scheduled to make an initial appearance on the 12 charges in Anaconda district court at 9 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 8.

Edwards is known for appearing in court sporting a cowboy hat and neatly pressed blue jeans. He's also known for taking high-profile cases and winning.

In 2007, Edwards represented 15 retired Montana Power Co. employees in a major civil case tried in Butte. This case ended with a \$17.4 million jury award for the employees and \$4 million in punitive damages against the former power company.