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EDITORIALS

Sheriff Should Repo Sergeant's Gun, Badge

A deputy's abuse of authority to intimidate car buyers as a moonlighting repo man has been costly — to everyone but the deputy.

It cost county taxpayers \$115,000 in legal fees. It cost the Bernalillo County Sheriff's Department the trust that should go hand in hand with its badge and uniform. It cost Sgt. Bobby Rohlfs a promotion and six whopping weeks' suspension.

Two recently settled lawsuits allege Rohlfs, who supervises the department's street crimes unit, misused his authority as a law enforcement officer in his gig as a repo man for an auto dealer. That he lied to get other deputies to do his dirty work. That the state's top cop, the attorney general, told him to knock it off.

But instead of getting thrown off the force for being a bully and a liar, for dragging the uniform his fellow deputies wear through the mud, for costing county taxpayers more than a hundred grand, Rohlfs has a six-week break to think about how he "misled" his department.

Misled? That's what you call conning three subordinates into flashing their badges at a woman who won't sign a new contract at a higher price for her SUV? Or using your law enforcement authority to insert yourself in the middle of a dealership-family dispute and threatening someone with arrest? Most folks would call that an unacceptable abuse of power.

Sheriff Darren White and Rohlfs' attorneys apparently spent months hammering out the disciplinary deal. Rohlfs can't appeal it.

But White shouldn't have approved it, because allowing someone like Rohlfs to keep his badge misleads a public that should be able to trust every deputy sheriff to do the right thing. He should have been fired.