

STORY COVER

/BY: **Carlos Moncada**

LARGO OFFICIAL SMITH APOLOGIZES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA POST THAT RILED POLICE, RESIDENTS

"ANYBODY HERE WOULD INSINUATE THAT THAT SHOWS THAT HE SAID THE POLICE OFFICERS BRUTALIZED HIM, BEAT HIM UP AND CAUSED HIM INJURIES. THAT ABSOLUTELY DID NOT OCCUR."

**-JONATHAN VASQUEZ,
PRESIDENT OF THE SUNCOAST POLICE BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION**

THE SINCE-DELETED POST WHICH INCITED CONTROVERSY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY, REPORTEDLY STATED, "I MAY HAVE A NEW DISTRUST FOR LARGO PD."

LARGO—In a stunning and emotion-filled admission, a longtime elected official publicly apologized for a posting on his social media account that he later conceded could have endangered city police officers.

City Commissioner Michael Smith shared a message on his personal Facebook account that questioned the veracity of the police department after an incident over the May 17-18 weekend in which he was impaired.

The since-deleted post, which incited controversy within the community, reportedly stated, "I may have a new distrust for Largo PD." The post included images of head injuries he had sustained at some point.

Smith acknowledged at the May 20 city commission meeting that the injuries were "my own doing," and said he

was "embarrassed" and "ashamed" for implying otherwise.

"Posting that from a commissioner was highly, highly inappropriate, and some of the comments I saw the next morning were horrible," the 14-year commission veteran said. "I pray that someone never harms one of our officers because of something I stupidly did."

Smith's admission, which lasted about five mostly awkward minutes, came during the end of the nearly two-hour commission meeting, which is televised live. Earlier, a police union official called Smith out while addressing the board.

"He showed himself with injuries, posted it to Facebook and said he has a new mistrust for the police department," said Jonathan Vasquez, president of the Suncoast Police Benevolent Association. "Anybody here would insinuate that that shows that he said the police officers brutalized him, beat him up and caused him injuries. That absolutely did not occur."

The commissioner said he subsequently met with Police Chief Mike Loux to apologize. He also reviewed police body-cam footage of his interaction with officers at a convenience store.

Smith said he did not remember the events depicted in the video, blaming medications he had taken along with alcohol.

Earlier that night, he said, he went out with his partner and ended up having "a bad experience."

An argument ensued, after which Smith said he drove home and took prescription Ambien "and two beers, unfortunately." He said he takes the sedative for insomnia.

After his partner walked home about two hours later, they had another argument, Smith said. He said he took another Ambien and "drove to a Wawa," which is where he encountered police.

An incident report states that Smith appeared intoxicated, slurring his words and struggling to stand upright. Presenting himself as a safety concern,



City Commissioner Michael Smith

Photo: The City of Largo

the report states, Smith was placed into custody under the state's Marchman Act, which allows someone to be sent to involuntary drug treatment. He was subsequently taken to Largo Medical Center.

"I was embarrassed by my actions," Smith said. "The police department was very professional. They did their job."

Smith said he realized his injuries were self-inflicted after watching video of himself "in my sleeping clothes and my sandals."

"I've been called a Mama's Boy," Smith said as he welled up, his voice cracking with emotion. "After I told her about this, she said, 'What the hell were you thinking?' She knows my family has a bad reaction with Ambien. And inebriated is not in my character."

Smith's comments were met with silence from his peers. However, Mayor Woody Brown reassured the public that the police department "is excellent, and they do a great job."

The mayor also encouraged Smith to get professional help, saying, "You know what you need to do."

The chief said in a statement that he thoroughly reviewed the body-cam video and will let it "stand for itself."

"I am confident the officers acted within the scope of their authority, did

not use excessive force, or cause any injury during the incident," Loux wrote. "I have spoken to Commissioner Smith regarding the incident and his Facebook post. He apologized for his actions. Our mission is to protect and serve the community, and our officers did exactly that."

One resident, Matt Faustini, said he wasn't familiar with details of the incident, but that "I just know Commissioner Smith for over 15 years. I know what kind of man he is. And I know that in my life, I have made mistakes. We all have."

"I hope that the police department, which deals with people who make mistakes every day, doesn't judge someone based on a bad moment in their life. A moment that they regret and are trying to make amends for."

Smith, 44, who is openly gay, was first elected to the at-large Seat 1 in 2011. The Largo native was re-elected to four-year terms in 2014, 2018, and 2022. His current term expires next year. He did not say whether he is considering stepping down.

"I will work, and my actions will show that whatever I need to do to prove myself to [police] and to the citizens that this was a poor, poor, poor decision," Smith said. "And I can only ask for forgiveness."

Image from Facebook-

Micheal Smith's Post

