

Triple murder suspect extradited to Moscow

Whitman County forgoes eluding charge against John Lee

Elizabeth Rudd/Lewiston Tribune

MOSCOW - The suspect in a Jan. 10 shooting rampage that left three Moscow residents dead was returned to Latah County early Monday evening.

John Lee, 30, of Moscow, was in custody of the Latah County Jail just hours after charges pending against him in Washington were dropped. Jail staff members confirmed Lee - who is facing multiple murder charges and an attempted murder charge - arrived from Whitman County and was in their custody.

Lee has spent the past two months in the Whitman County Jail awaiting trial on a felony eluding charge for allegedly leading police on a high-speed pursuit along U.S. Highway 195. The chase ensued after a series of reported shootings in Moscow.

Lee is accused of shooting and killing his adoptive mother, Terri L. Grzebielski, 61; his landlord, David M. Trail, 76; and Moscow Arby's manager Belinda G. Niebuhr, 47; and injuring Seattle resident Michael M.M. Chin, 39. As a result, he is facing three counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted first-degree murder in Latah County.

Whitman County Prosecutor Denis Tracy said he decided to dismiss Lee's case in Washington for a number of reasons after taking time to re-evaluate it. He filed a motion Monday to dismiss the felony eluding charge without prejudice, giving him the ability to file the charge again if Lee is not convicted in Idaho.

Lee was scheduled for a May 11 trial in Whitman County Superior Court, which had been delayed from the original March 16 start date. Pullman attorney Steve Martonick was representing Lee in the Washington case.

Tracy previously said he intended to prosecute his case prior to sending Lee back to Idaho. He indicated when the trial was delayed he would review his case and decide how to proceed.

The eluding charge is a serious offense, Tracy said, but not as serious as the multiple murder charges Lee is facing in Latah County. If convicted, he said he does not realistically expect Lee to ever be released from Idaho's custody.

Tracy said it is a better use of his resources - which according to his motion are limited - to drop Lee's case and prosecute others instead. His motion also notes the completion of a formal extradition process for Lee's return to Idaho.

The extradition process was completed earlier this month when Whitman County Superior Court Judge David Frazier signed an order mandating Lee be returned to Idaho immediately upon the

Washington case's resolution. The order was issued when Frazier received an extradition warrant from Washington Gov. Jay Inslee.

"I've been in contact with the Latah (County) prosecutors and they are ready for Mr. Lee," Tracy said.

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