

Judge Clifford resigns: Sixth District justice was reprimanded last fall for misconduct

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Sixth District Judge Eric Clifford resigned Wednesday from the bench that serves Red River and Lamar counties, according to a spokesman for the Texas Office of the Governor.



Clifford

Clifford has come under fire since the Texas Commission on Judicial Conduct issued a nine-page public reprimand in September for a wide range of misconduct. The commission found Clifford used his title as judge to promote a private business, made inappropriate public comments about pending criminal and custody cases, played favorites when appointing lawyers, threatened a law enforcement officer and misused his office when demanding that a neighbor pay him for veterinary bills.

"Finally, the commission concludes that Judge Clifford's initial lack of candor during the Commission's investigation into these allegations proved to be an aggravating factor in reaching a final decision in this case," the reprimand states.

Clifford has refused to respond to requests for comment from the Gazette since the September reprimand and could not be reached Wednesday.

Because the reprimand was issued publicly, the complaints leading to it, supporting documents and an audio recording of Clifford's sworn testimony given before the commission Aug. 14 are public records as well. During the Aug. 14 hearing, Clifford made disparaging remarks about Lamar County's district attorney and area defense attorneys. Several of the lawyers mentioned by Clifford in his testimony said in previous interviews that Clifford lied under oath.

"It's disappointing that an elected official would choose to lash out at another elected official when he's the one accused of wrongdoing," Lamar County District Attorney Gary Young said in an interview in October.

In response to the public release of Clifford's testimony, the lawyers filed more than 60

motions asking that Clifford recuse himself from pending cases. Copies of the Commission's reprimand and quotes from his sworn testimony are attached to the motions. The recusals mean other judges have had to step in and assume the cases Clifford's comments made him ineligible to hear.

Clifford withdrew his name as a candidate for re-election in the 2016 Republican primary at the last minute in December. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott will be tasked with appointing a replacement to serve until Jan. 1, 2017, when the newly elected judge will be sworn in and take office.

Paris, Texas, lawyer Wes Tidwell won the Republican primary for the 6th District bench March 1. He faces Democratic candidate Gary Waite, a Paris lawyer, in November's general election.

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