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A Disgrace: Former judge should not get a cent if there is any legal way to avoid it

July 5th, 2016 | by Gazette Staff | in Opinion Editorial | Read Time: 1 min.

We have covered in the newspaper the long running saga of former Lamar County 6th District Judge Eric Clifford.

The judge was reprimanded for 11 violations by the State Commission on Judiciary Conduct after an investigation into several complaints. They include misusing his office, making inappropriate comments on pending legal cases, playing favorites while appointing lawyers to cases, threatening a law enforcement officer, and using his position to promote private business in which he is a major shareholder and from which he receives generous dividends.

The commission also said he wasn't as cooperative as he should have been during the investigation. By resigning he managed to avoid further disciplinary action on three more complaints.

Clifford stepped down in March and in May signed an agreement never to serve as a judge in Texas again.

But the story isn't over.

It turns out that he may draw \$70,000 in disability retirement pay—possibly for the rest of his life.


Put it down to a quirk in state law. Although he hadn't served long enough for regular retirement, Clifford had already served the seven years required by state law for physical or mental disability retirement. He also managed to get the necessary doctors' recommendations and certification to meet the disability standards of the Texas Supreme Court and the state Employee Retirement System Board. He was deemed disabled in February—after he was reprimanded but before his resignation.

Disability works out to 50 percent of his \$140,000 yearly salary, so that means \$70,000 a year for as long as his disability lasts.

This is a travesty. But since Clifford was not found guilty of anything in court and was not removed from office, there is probably nothing much that can be done about it.

That doesn't mean lawmakers shouldn't try. Texas state Rep. Gary VanDeaver, R-District 1, who serves our area, said he would look into the matter. We hope he does so. If there is any legal way to deny such a substantial income to this former judge, we hope VanDeaver and the Legislature can find it.

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