

Judge seat waits on governor

Connie Beard | Posted: Friday, March 25, 2016 10:57 am

More than 700 cases are pending in 6th District Court, according to District Court Clerk Shawntel Golden.

According to Deputy Press Secretary Sam Taylor, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's office is taking applications for the vacancy created with the resignation Wednesday of 6th District Court Judge Eric Clifford.

Once a vacancy is announced, the governor's appointment office accepts applications and conducts interview rounds, Taylor said. Once this process is completed, Abbott makes an appointment.

As of Thursday afternoon, there were no applications on file at the appointment office, according to Taylor.

"Gov. Abbott selects and appoints individuals he believes are the most qualified and capable of bringing excellence to the organizations in which they service," Taylor added. "There is no set time limit on appointing a judge to a vacancy. It could take weeks or months, depending on the number of applicants and interviews."

There are currently 728 cases pending in the 6th District Court.

The caseload under Clifford's jurisdiction has been portioned to two area judges, according to Judge Mary Murphy, presiding judge for the First Administration Judicial Region of the State of Texas Judicial Branch.

County Court at Law Judge Bill Harris and 62nd District Judge Will Biard have been assigned to cover Clifford's docket for the rest of the year, Murphy said, adding she does not expect to assign any cases to judges from adjacent areas.

"In February, we received an order from Judge Murphy and she assigned Judge Harris to hear any case in 6th District Court throughout December," Golden said. "I don't think she will send another judge here. I think Judge Harris and Judge Biard will just end up picking up the slack."

Golden said any case that falls in 6th District Court as a civil matter goes to Biard.

"They've always helped each other out. Judge Harris is here all the time and he is kind of a sitting judge for the 6th District Court right now," Golden said.

If a person is appointed to the vacancy, they will hold the position until the end of Clifford's current term, which is Jan. 1. At that time, the winner of the November general election between Republican Wes Tidwell and Democrat Gary Waite will take over the position.

Both Tidwell and Waite are attorneys in Paris.

Clifford's resignation letter sent to Abbott stated, "ERS and Chief Justice Hecht have certified my eligibility for disability retirement. I resign my position as Judge of the Sixth Judicial District Court, of Lamar & Red River Counties as of March 23, 2016."

Joseph Brown contributed to this report.