

South Ga. judge accused of misconduct to resign

By JEFFERY SCOTT The Atlanta Journal-Constitution Published on: 04/16/08

Facing a hearing in three weeks to remove him from the bench on charges of judicial misconduct, South Georgia Superior Court Judge Brooks Blicht III agreed Tuesday to resign from office after 28 years as one of the most powerful judges in the state.

Blicht's attorney, former Georgia Gov. Roy Barnes, said Blicht, 73, had decided not to run for re-election, and that was what prompted his resignation, not the investigation. "When he decided not to run, the [case against him] became largely moot," Barnes said.

The state agency that called for Blicht's resignation last fall, the Judicial Qualifications Commission, on Monday set the hearing date after months of investigations and interviews with witnesses.

Former Georgia Attorney General Michael Bowers, who is prosecuting the case for the JQC, declined to speculate on the timing of Blicht's decision to resign, effective June 30.

The Judicial Qualifications Commission has charged Blicht with 13 instances of judicial misconduct, including running an alleged secret fund that collected money from criminal defendants to pay county employees, releasing prisoners early, and letting his wife, former Georgia State Sen. Peg Blicht, conduct business from his judge's office in Homerville.

According to the agreement, Blicht cannot hear criminal cases between now and his resignation and cannot seek or hold any judicial office in the future. The JQC board and the Georgia Supreme Court will have to sign off on the agreement.

"I don't think that will be a problem," Bowers said.

Blicht will not be prosecuted criminally by the JQC, Bowers said.

It is not clear whether Blicht will keep his license to practice law.

Blicht is still the subject of a separate, 4-year-long Federal investigation of the five-county Alapaha Judicial Circuit.

Barnes described the federal probe as a "tempest in a teapot. I don't know why the FBI isn't out investigating terrorists instead," he said.