

Special Judges appointed to hear Katrina cases in Jackson County

October 9, 2008

Eleven special judges will be appointed on Thursday, Oct. 9, to hear civil cases related to Hurricane Katrina in Jackson County.

Judges of the Circuit and County Courts of Jackson County recused themselves from hearing civil cases related to Hurricane Katrina. The courts of Jackson County recently requested special judge appointments in approximately 242 civil cases pending in the Circuit Court and 19 cases pending in the County Court.

The special judges include seven retired judges, three former presidents of the Mississippi Bar and a law professor.

Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice James W. Smith Jr. will administer the oath of office at 3 p.m. Oct. 9 to some of the special judges. They will meet in the Board of Bar Admissions Conference Room at the Gartin Justice Building in Jackson.

The special judges are:

- former Hinds County Court Judge James Bell of Jackson;
- Patricia W. Bennett of Jackson, professor of law at the Mississippi College School of Law, former assistant district attorney and assistant U.S. attorney;
- Richard Thomas Bennett of Jackson, former Mississippi Bar president;
- retired Court of Appeals Judge Billy G. Bridges of Brandon;
- retired Circuit Judge R. Kenneth Coleman of New Albany;
- retired Chancery Judge William J. Lutz of Canton;
- retired Chancery Judge Ray H. Montgomery of Canton;
- retired Chancery Judge Edward C. Prisock of Louisville;
- Charles J. Swayze Jr. of Greenwood, former Mississippi Bar president;
- William C. "Cham" Trotter III of Belzoni, former Mississippi Bar president;
- retired Chancery Judge Thomas L. Zebert of Pearl.

Judge Bell will hear the Jackson County Court cases. The Jackson County Circuit Court cases will be divided among 10 special judges, with Judge Bridges handling additional administrative duties.

Judges Bridges and Prisock have previously heard other Katrina-related cases by special appointment. The submission of requests for special judge appointments in a large number of cases in September and October required the Supreme Court to make additional special judge appointments. Chief Justice Smith said that the cases are too numerous and potentially too time-consuming to be assigned to currently serving trial judges in other districts.

Salaries will be paid from \$300,000 appropriated by the Mississippi Legislature to cover the special judge appointments which were expected to result from Katrina-related litigation.

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