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WALKER COUNTY TREASURER'S OFFICE

Burton gets probation, resigns

County commission will fill position until new treasurer elected



Annette Burton

By ED HOWELL
Eagle Senior Writer

Walker County Treasurer Annette Burton of Pineywoods entered a guilty plea to six felony counts Friday in regards to taking county funds, getting probation for 15 years but also having to resign the office she had held for three terms.

"It is always sad and particularly disappointing when a public official has violated the public trust," said Attorney General King said Friday in a statement. "In this case, as county treasurer, Annette Burton was responsible for safeguarding public funds and had a special obligation to act as a good steward for the taxpayers.

"Today she has been brought to justice for betraying that trust. My promise to the citizens of Walker County, and to all of Alabama, is that officeholders will be held to the same standard as all citizens, and when they commit crimes, they will be vigorously prosecuted."

The Walker County Commission — made up of all

Democrats — will now follow state law to appoint a new treasurer, who will hold office for the unexpired term until a new treasurer is elected this year.

Circuit Judge John Bentley accepted the guilty plea at the Walker County Courthouse Friday before a crowd of well-

See BURTON, A9 ►

CARBON HILL CITY COUNCIL

Cagle seeking mayor's office

By ELANE JONES
Eagle Reporter

Jean Cagle of Carbon Hill has never run for any political office before, she's decided to run for office of mayor of Carbon Hill because she said she wants to help move her community forward.

Cagle has lived in Carbon Hill the majority of her life and raised her children...



Jean Cagle

Election08

Farris won't run; Ingle signs



white man, fired the bullet that killed King as he stood

this man. What did he say? What did he think?"

advocates for equality and civil rights. ... We have made

enter City Hall as the mayor," Herenton said.

Burton

From A1

wishers. The state essentially agreed not to oppose probation in place of jail time, as Burton's attorney, Eddie Jackson, put on a number of witnesses testifying to the severe family medical conditions she is constantly attending to.

Jackson said Burton was entering a "best interest" plea, meaning that she was not admitting to guilt, but that if the trial were to be held the state would be able to convict her based on the evidence.

Burton, who wiped away tears on the witness stand while she pleaded, will also have to pay restitution of \$7,942.52, plus a victims assessment fee of \$100 and court costs. Burton said she can pay back those funds within 90 days.

Bentley, who serves in Marion and Winston counties, was appointed to serve in the case as all local judges recused themselves from presiding.

The hearing coincided with the last day of qualifying for treasurer. State Rep. Tommy Sherer, D-Jasper, has pushed a local bill to eliminate the office at the end of this term, but state Sen. Charles Bishop, R-Arley, said Friday

afternoon he will not sign off on the bill now that candidates have already qualified for the position. Bishop also maintains the Treasurer's Office is a good checks-and-balances system in tandem with the county commission.

Burton, 51, was arrested and charged in February 2007 on 12 counts of forgery, theft and using her office for personal gain. She was released on \$20,000 bond.

Deputy Attorney General Bill Lisenby, acting chief of the Attorney General's Public Corruption and White Collar Crime Division, briefly laid out that Burton took county funds and then used forged deposit slips to cover up the deed in county records.

The forgery counts included exhibits of seven deposit tickets from First National Bank of Jasper dealing with the General Fund and the Solid Waste Department, as well as two deposit receipt lists generated by the Walker County Commission for deposits in the General Fund. Two of the bank deposit tickets involved the General Fund account, while the other five involved the Solid Waste Department.

As custodian of all county funds, the Walker County

treasurer is responsible for maintaining and reconciling what by 2004 had grown to more than 100 separate accounts.

In handing sentence, Bentley gave Burton a 15-year suspended sentence with 15 years probation. All the probation was to be supervised. However, Bentley noted his sentence was stiffer than recommended sentencing guidelines call for, which would allow for probation officials to be able after three years to move for non-supervised probation.

After the hearing, Jackson showed reporters a copy of a one-sentence letter submitted by Burton to Lisenby that day: "I hereby resign as treasurer of Walker County as of April 4, 2008. Annette Burton." Jackson said the resignation took effect immediately after the hearing.

Jackson offered testimony at the start of the hearing to set up the argument that Burton was popular and that she was more needed at home to deal with a series of family medical needs, particularly with her son Matt, 30.

Dr. Kendall C. Vague of Southern Orthopedic and Sports Medicine, who attends Woodland Trace Church of

Christ with Burton, said her son suffers from severe muscular degeneration, which also has led to kidney deterioration, constant kidney stones and problems with vascular circulation.

"He is in the hospital frequently from this disease. She is constantly caring for him almost on a daily basis," Vague said. "It is a very rare condition."

Sonny Richardson, the retired county veterans service officer whose office was next door to Burton's at the courthouse, said sending her to prison would be detrimental to her family.

"If she is incarcerated, you will be taking away the mother's care," he said.

"Matt's in very bad health," said accountant Terri Rutledge of Jasper Accounting, a long-time close friend of Burton who testified in court. "Her total consideration is for Matt."

Lisenby said that Burton's actions had left a "breach of trust with the people of Walker County," but that the state was also mindful of the medical conditions in the family. As a result, he said the state would defer to the sentence of the court.

Qualifying

From A1

the term until the new treasurer is elected.

Ingle goes to GOP



Earnest, 1306 Blackwell Dr., Parrish. Republicans: None.

Walker County Commission, District 4

Democrats: Randy Bridges (I), 2826
Dismore/Conroy Road, Jasper;