

Panel censures Dallas judge for remarks about victims

By Michael Holmes
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A state judicial panel on Tuesday censured a Dallas judge who said he gave a lighter sentence to a killer because the victims were "queers."

The State Commission on Judicial Conduct issued the censure order for District Judge Jack Hampton, whose remarks to reporters in December ignited a year-long storm of criticism.

"The commission finds that Judge Hampton's comments, per se, were destructive of public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary," the commission's order said.

Public censure is the strongest action the commission could take short of recommending 57-year-old Republican's removal from the bench. Robert

Flowers, the panel's executive director, read a commission report describing public censure as "tantamount to denunciation."

Gay activists applauded the public censure. William Waybourn, president of the Dallas Gay Alliance, called for Hampton to step down.

"I believe that it's certainly a step in the right direction. But Judge Hampton remains on the bench. What is to happen now to gay men and lesbians who come into his courtroom?" Waybourn said.

"Any minority that has any fear of the judicial system and cannot get a fair trial as long as we have people sitting on the bench like Judge Hampton," he said.

But attorneys for Hampton said they were disappointed that "the commission must have succumbed to pressure from the media and from unin-

formed special interest groups" in issuing the censure, a serious penalty for a judge.

Bill Nelson, an attorney for the Dallas Gay Alliance, said the group intends to file a petition with the Texas Supreme Court calling for Hampton's removal.

The commission ruled that Hampton's statements to news reporters violated the Code of Judicial Conduct, which prohibits public comment on a pending case and requires judges to promote public confidence in the judiciary.

"The hostility and distrust generated by this judge's irresponsible statements created an additional burden for the entire judiciary," the order said.

Hampton's office said Tuesday he would not comment. A statement issued from Hampton's attorney, David Kidder, was sharply critical of the commission's move.

"The Commission has ignored most of the findings and conclusions of the special master, who was appointed by the Texas Supreme Court and is the only neutral arbiter in this entire proceeding," the statement said.

In December 1988, Hampton said that he sentenced Richard Lee Bednarski to 30 years in prison - instead of life - for the slaying of two men in a park because the victims were gay.

"Those two gays that got killed wouldn't have been killed if they hadn't been cruising the streets picking up teenage boys," Hampton said.

In its ruling, the judicial conduct commission noted that and other remarks made by Hampton to reporters. Among comments the commission cited:

• "I don't much care for queers

cruising the streets picking up teen-age boys. I've got a teen-age boy."

• "Some murder victims are less innocent in their deaths than others. In those cases, a defendant is unlikely to deserve a maximum sentence."

• "The victims were homosexuals. They were out in the homosexual area picking up teenage boys. Had they not been out there trying to spread AIDS around, they'd still be alive today."

• "Just spell my name right. ... If it makes anyone mad they'll forget it by 1990."

Hampton, appointed to the bench in 1982 by Gov. Bill Clements, subsequently won re-election and will run for re-election in 1990. Clements on Tuesday refused to discuss the rebuke.

Postal Service refuses stamp

DENVER (AP) - It was pretty tacky when the U.S. Postal Service refused to accept its newly issued no-lick stamp, but a postal official trying to put the best face on a sticky situation admitted he was licked.

"We probably did our usual terrible job of internal marketing, and didn't let our employees know we were test marketing this," said Dick Able, postal service marketing director in Denver, where the stamps are being tested.

"It sounds like we've already antagonized one customer," he said.

Edward Cook, an airline consultant, got a bit unglued after the San Francisco post office didn't recognize the tacky-back stamp on a letter he was trying to send to his daughter at Stanford University.

Not only did the Postal Service return his letter marked "Not a postage stamp," but the postman also charged him 25 cents for returning his letter.

The new stamps, which cost an extra three cents each, are guaranteed to stick without licking.

"I didn't want to pay 28 cents for a stamp I could get for 25 cents, but my wife wanted to try them," Cook said. "I'm sure not buying any more."

In the meantime, the post office has offered Cook free delivery of his letter, and an apology.

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