

LOCAL NEWS

State Ethics Commission member named to judgeship

By **SHANNON MCCAFFREY** ASSOCIATED PRESS – published Thursday, December 8, 2011 **0 comments**

ATLANTA — A member of Georgia's ethics commission said Wednesday he is stepping down from the panel after just three months to accept an appointment as a judge.

Chan Caudell, of Cornelia, told The Associated Press he would submit his letter of resignation to Gov. Nathan Deal.

Deal, who had appointed Caudell to the state ethics commission in August, tapped him this week to fill a vacant judgeship in the Superior Court of the Mountain Judicial Circuit. The Georgia constitution bans individuals from serving simultaneously in two branches of government.

Caudell's sudden departure is the latest upheaval on the five-member panel that oversees campaign finance and lobbying in the state.

Chairman Patrick Millsaps and Vice Chairman Josh Belinfante both stepped down in recent months. Belinfante is running for the state Senate.

Executive secretary Stacey Kalberman and her top deputy were also forced out this summer. Kalberman refused to accept a pay cut and the No. 2 spot was eliminated.

The commission is also seeking a new director of technology, according to a job posting on their website. The agency's new Executive Secretary Holly LaBerge declined to comment.

The ethics panel — renamed the Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission — has been hit hard with funding cuts that some say have undermined its ability to perform its duties. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported that the cash-strapped agency had to reduce fines owed to the state by Georgia politicians and officeholders because they could not afford to send out the require late notices.

The commission investigates campaign finance complaints and has several pending against Deal stemming from last year's gubernatorial campaign. The Republican, through his lawyer Randy Evans, has denied any wrongdoing.

Last month, Deal named Heath Garrett, former chief of staff to U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson, to the commission.

Now he will have to name Caudell's replacement. Caudell was a board member for the watchdog group Common Cause Georgia and his appointment to the ethics commission had won praise from good government advocates.

William Perry, head of Common Cause Georgia, called the heavy turnover



at the commission worrisome.

"It's musical chairs and that always causes a problem because there's a learning curve to being a commissioner and being on staff there," Perry said.

Caudell told the AP that while he's disappointed to be leaving the commission after serving at one meeting the judicial post was one he simply couldn't pass up.

"I passed on a similar opportunity two years ago and I was left with some regrets," he said.

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