

Lawyers, Judges Happy for Judge Biggs, Heep Her With Praise

By RICHARD L. WILLIAMS
Chronicle Executive Editor

Most area lawyers and judges were not shocked to hear that Loretta C. Biggs announced her resignation this week as Forsyth County district court judge.

Many had heard rumors for as long as six weeks that Biggs would accept a position with the U.S. attorney's office in Greensboro.

"I'm a federal judge and it would be wise for me to know what's going on in the federal court," said Senior U.S. District Court Judge Richard C. Erwin. "It was one of the things that was told

to you and was said to keep your mouth shut, and this time it was done. That's pretty hard to do here and in most places."

Erwin said he is happy for Biggs.

"I think she will do an excellent job; she is held in high esteem," said Erwin, a federal judge for nearly 14 years.

Superior Court Judge James A. Beatty said he was not surprised by Biggs' move.

"It will give her the opportunity to expand her horizons a little bit," he said. "Certainly, I wish her well."

He said there is tremendous pressure day in and day out on dis-

trict court judges. It was not surprising, he said, that when the position became available, that U.S. Attorney Walter C. Holton Jr. would look to Biggs. The two worked together in the Forsyth County district attorney's office in the mid-1980s and have remained close.

Others also offered praise for Forsyth County's first black female district court judge.

"I'm very pleased that Loretta has been selected to be an assistant U.S. attorney," said Phillip S. Banks III, a Winston-Salem lawyer. "I went to school with Loretta and she is highly intelligent and a good strategic thinker. I think the commu-

nity will benefit from her time and service."

Biggs and Banks attended Howard University law school.

After law school, Biggs became legal counsel for Coca-Cola Co. in her hometown of Atlanta. She later moved to Forsyth County, where her husband was hired at Wachovia Corp. and became an assistant district attorney. She also has served as an adjunct law professor at Wake Forest School of Law.

"She's an excellent judge. It's a lost to the district court bench for her to leave," said Luellen Curry, an associate professor of law at Wake Forest.

Rep. Annie Brown Kennedy, D-Forsyth and of the law firm Kennedy Kennedy Kennedy & Kennedy, said Biggs in her new role will complement the crime-prevention efforts of Attorney General Janet Reno.

"I think Judge Biggs will do well," Kennedy said. "Perhaps her new position will be a challenge to find ways to help reduce crime."

"I feel (Reno) is sincere about finding ways to reduce crime and I feel Judge Biggs will add to the goal of reducing crime in the Middle District," Kennedy said. "I feel (Biggs') background and experience will help (Reno) to not only recog-

nize what some of our problems are, but will also ensure that they are effectively addressed."

Biggs said that it is "highly likely" that she would have some contact with Reno.

"I could have contact with Reno," Biggs said. "I'm being brought on to implement programs that she is advocating."

Biggs' husband, Larry, is vice president and manager of community development for Wachovia Corp. They live in Lewisville and have two children, ages 10 and 8.

Judge Biggs to Join

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nity to do some things I can't do from the bench."

Biggs will work closely with local agencies to implement some programs that will help curb violence — the first time such effort has been undertaken by the U.S. attorney's office.

Biggs said she expects to have a large impact on crime reduction because of the federal funds that will be available. On the local level, less money is available to enact programs.

"If we can keep some of the younger kids from coming into the system then we've accomplished something," she said. "But we can't fix the situation we're in overnight — just like it was not overnight that we got into this fix."

Biggs, 40, makes \$65,674 as a district court judge; her new salary could not be confirmed yesterday. Scott Mebane, a spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office in Greensboro,

said salaries of assistant U.S. attorneys are not public record — only that of the U.S. Attorney Walter C. Holton Jr., who makes \$115,700 annually.

Biggs will work out of the Greensboro federal office for about two months before manning the vacant federal office here.

Her departure will leave only one black and one female among the remaining six judges in district court. Gov. Jim Hunt has the power to make an appointment for her seat following recommendations from the Forsyth County Bar. The bar must hold an election within a month of the effective date of Biggs' resignation. It then must submit three names to Hunt. If Hunt fails to name a replacement after two months, the judgeship goes to the bar member with the highest votes.

Biggs said she would like a black female to replace her. She mentioned the name of one of her

closest friends, Beverly R. Mitchell, a graduate of Wake Forest law school and a solo practitioner of civil law, as a potential candidate.

Whoever replaces Biggs would have to run in the 1996 election to retain the seat.

Biggs came to the bench in 1987 when she was appointed by Hunt. She retained the seat by winning two elections, one unopposed and one a bitterly fought contest against Tori Roemer. During that 1992 campaign, Roemer, the daughter of a wealthy and influential Republican, was fired as an assistant district attorney by District Attorney Tom Keith for running what he called a racist campaign.

The move will reunite Biggs with Holton, who was named U.S. Attorney for the Middle District in March by President Clinton. Biggs and Holton worked together in the Forsyth County district attorney's office in the mid-1980s.

Biggs Could Be Positioned

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any level — is not a prerequisite for a federal judge appointment. On several instances lawyers have been appointed to federal judge without ever sitting on a state bench or working in as a federal prosecutor. Few of them, however, have been a minority and even fewer women.

"Federal judges come from all sorts of background," said Bob Walsh, Dean of the Wake Forest University law school.

While Biggs strains to keep from intimating that she will use the assistant U.S. attorney's position as a stepping stone, she does realize that the opportunity for a federal judge position is there.

"There certainly is a possibility of that, and this position clearly postures me for that," she said.

"That clearly may be an option at some point."

Biggs said that should she look to exercise that option, "it would help tremendously" to have worked in the U.S. attorney's office. Others, including lawyer and state Rep. Annie Brown Kennedy, D-Forsyth, agree.

"I would think that the U.S. attorney's office being a federal position might be a good move for her," Kennedy said. "It could put her on track to be a federal judge."

At 40, Biggs has had an accelerated political career since she first left Howard University School of Law in 1979 in the top five of her class. She was legal counsel for Coca-Cola Co. in Atlanta before she became an assistant district

attorney in Forsyth County. From there, she received an appointment from the governor to the bench followed by two elected terms — one unopposed and one that was bitterly contested and included charges of racist tactics by her opponent, the daughter of an aristocratic Republican.

Campaigning is the one thing that Biggs said she does not miss. A federal prosecutor is not an elected office, and although her boss, U.S. Attorney Walter C. Holton Jr., could lose his appointment under a Republican administration "if Democrats lose the presidency in 1996, Biggs' job is secure for a lifetime."

Bidders Fail in Minority, Women Hirings

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accepting new bids.

The board of aldermen voted 4-3 Tuesday to look for new bids because the two top contenders, Fabrizio Construction Co. and Turner Building Systems, used its

own methods to find minorities instead of guidelines set by the city.

Turner, who proposed to do the entire job for \$288,176, followed the city's guidelines but didn't commit to hiring any minority or women

subcontractors.

"I think we need to go back and give them both a chance to start over," said East Ward Alderman Joycelyn Johnson, who moved to reject the bids. "There were a lot of

inconsistencies on everyone's part."

Fabrizio Construction Co. bid \$225,000 for the project and agreed to hire minorities and women but missed the goals of 12 percent minority and 3 percent

women.

Allen Joines, an assistant city manager, said the city feels that the good-faith effort has worked well in the past, but will review the guidelines.

"We had 67 percent of projects by contractors last year that exceeded the goals established," he said. "We feel it's working well, but we will look at the good-faith model to prevent further occurrences."

Economic Development Key Challenge for Blacks

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The conference's theme, Challenges of the 21st Century, will explore important issues facing the African-American community such as the future of the youth, economic development, education and politics. Caucus planners expect a number of African-American leaders across the state to pour into Winston-Salem. Some of the expected attendees include state Speaker of the House Dan Blue, Rainbow Coalition President Jesse Jackson and Congressmen Eva Clayton and Mel Watt. Many local business and community leaders are also expected to attend.

Harris said resources to help

African Americans become more aware of money set aside for economic development by the General Assembly will be discussed. She said, in general, most people are not familiar with the state's budget. There are some opportunities for resources, but many times they are hard to reach. She added that the workshop will also deal with issues surrounding business and community development.

One of the conference highlights will be a tribute to retiring and deceased legislators. Pat Degraff, one of the event's organizers, said two of the honorees are Rep. Annie Brown-Kennedy and

deceased Rep. Herman Gist of Greensboro. The tribute will be on the June 15 at the Anderson Center at Winston-Salem State University.

Youths will also be a part of this year's conference. They will participate in workshops dealing with issues facing their generation.

"The workshops will be geared toward being informative and proactive to get the black youth really thinking about are they prepared for the 21st century," Earline Parmon said.

Parmon, executive director of LIFT Academy and Forsyth County Commissioner, has been working with youth to plan the workshops.

She said they came up with the ideas for the workshops and prospective speakers.

Degraffinreid referred to the youth sessions as a "conference within the conference." Parmon agreed, saying the youth conference is not separate from the caucus conference, but is an opportunity for youth to learn how to develop their own conferences and focus on issues on their own. There will be opportunities for interaction with adult leaders and all of the meals will be together, including the youth luncheon on Saturday.

The youth workshops are designed to deal with a wide variety

of topics such as cultural issues, sex, violence and education.

The Rev. John Mendez, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, will lead a workshop on conflict resolution and Smith will lead a session on rites of passage. Parmon said other speakers have been asked to participate, including motivational speakers from Dayton, Ohio.

Youths staying overnight will get a taste of the college atmosphere because they will be housed at WSSU. And all youth activities will take place on the campus.

"If we're going to be talking about education, we should give them exposure to campus life," Par-

mon said.

Representatives from the state's 11 historically black colleges have been invited to the conference to speak to the youths.

Parmon said the workshops will deal with the issues and hold nothing back.

"We're dealing with a crisis and we don't need to play games with our youth," Parmon said. "We need to help them understand and hopefully give them some skills to be able to cope with upcoming challenges."

In addition to the workshops, youth will also have a pizza party Friday and a dance on Saturday.

East Winston CDC Gets \$160,000 in Grant Money

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tion for at least three years are considered mature, she said.

These investments by CDI are designed to stimulate \$100 million of development over the next three years.

CDI grew out of the need for

added support and funding for CDCs in North Carolina. It is the only statewide public-private partnership of this type in the country that has brought together local leaders, state capital, private foundations and private corporations.

The East Winston CDC also received an interest-free planning loan for \$13,500 from the N.C. Housing Finance Agency's HOME program to develop rental housing for low-income families. The Housing Finance Agency is a self-sup-

porting agency created by the General Assembly.

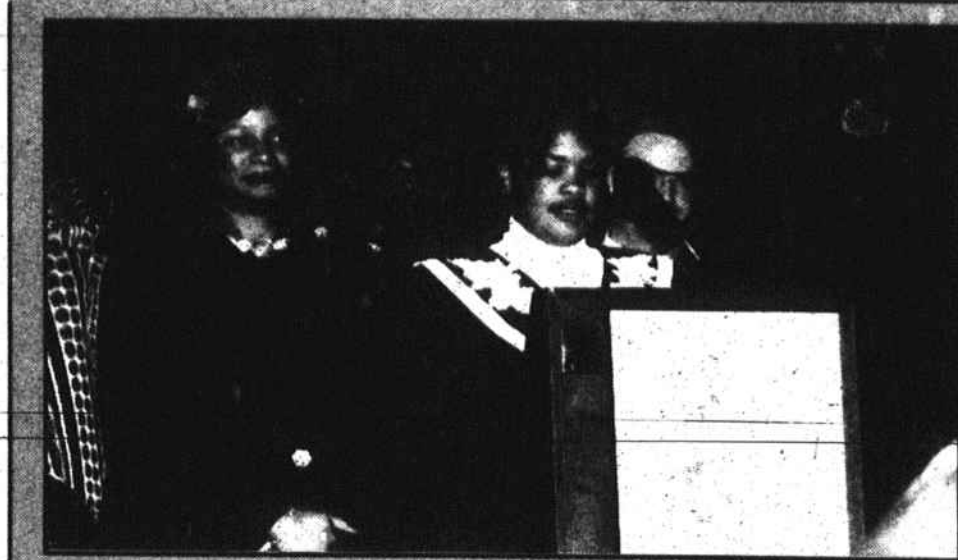
CDI funds are part of a total \$8.6 million given out for affordable housing. The loans pay for market studies and architectural, engineering and environmental work that is

necessary before a new development can apply for permanent financing.

A memo from the agency indicates that the CDC plans to use the money as a planning loan for 48 rental units produced through acqui-

sition and rehabilitation of six buildings.

CDI Executive Director James Grace could not be reached for comment.



Loretta Biggs is shown here with her daughter as Biggs received the Chronicle's co-woman of the year award in March.

"Thank You for Allowing Me to Serve You"

It is with mixed emotions that I tender my letter of resignation as District Court judge to Gov. Jim Hunt this week. Serving this community first as an assistant district attorney and for the last seven years as judge has been both professionally challenging and personally rewarding. The decision to step down has come after much deliberation and prayer. Thank you for allowing me to serve you.

I will continue to serve this community as an assistant United States attorney for the Middle District of North Carolina with special duties in the area of crime prevention. My experience on the bench has taught me that crime prevention must be a major component of any long-term law-enforcement strategy if that tragedy is to be effective in reducing crime and not merely punishing criminals. Attorney General Janet Reno and our United States Attorney Walter Holton are both firmly committed to this philosophy. I will work with Mr. Holton to develop and coordinate strategies to reduce crime in the Middle District. I am excited about this opportunity.

For the last few years I have witnessed and indeed been a part of a criminal justice system that has struggled to cope with the escalation in violent crime of our youth. It has become increasingly clear to me that often by the time these young people become part of the criminal-justice system it is too late to influence their behavior. If you have a young person who is willing to die or kill others, the threat of juvenile detention or jail is of little consequence. We must reach these young people long before they become a part of the criminal justice system. Our community energy must be directed at ensuring that these young people do not become a part of this system

rather than directing so much energy on their treatment once they are already in the system.

It is time to start building citizens for tomorrow and not just locking children away today. The \$38,000 per year we spend to house a juvenile in training school for one year can be better spent. Nowhere else in our lives do we invest money where there is little likelihood of any return on our investment.

Those of you have worked with me and those who may have appeared before me know that the safety of our citizens has always been my number one priority; that I believe strongly in individual responsibility and believe further that those who choose to commit crimes must be held accountable for their actions. However, 10 years in the criminal-justice system has taught me that fear of the law is not an effective long-term crime-reduction strategy. The most effective obstacle to crime is and will be citizens who have ownership in community, who respect themselves and the rights of others, and who obey the law because it is the right thing to do for all of us.

Developing strategies to address this problem will not be a simple task. However, unless we are willing to throw away an entire segment of our community, it is a task that must be undertaken.

Again, I wish to thank you for placing your trust in me and your many kind expressions of support over the years. I look forward to working with many of you to develop and strengthen community-based strategies to reduce crime in our community.

Forsyth County Court Judge
Loretta C. Biggs