

**BEFORE THE ARKANSAS JUDICIAL DISCIPLINE
AND DISABILITY COMMISSION**

IN THE MATTER OF:)
)
Honorable Jim Bob Steel) Commission Case No. 99-200

FINAL DECISION AND ORDER

Pursuant to authority granted by Amendment 66 to the Arkansas Constitution, A.C.A. 16-10-410 et seq. and the Rules of Procedure of the Arkansas Judicial Discipline and Disability Commission promulgated by the Arkansas Supreme Court, the Commission issues this Final Decision and Order.

I. FINDINGS OF FACTS

1. At all times relevant hereto, respondent Jim Bob Steel, was and continues to be the municipal court judge in Pike county and the city court judge in Greenwood, Arkansas.

2. On April 3, 1999, respondent purchased a vehicle from Russell Chevrolet/Honda Auto dealership in Sherwood, Arkansas. As part of the financial arrangements, he furnished the dealership with a \$5,000 check and took possession of the vehicle.

3. On April 23, 1999, the dealership was notified by a bank that respondent's check had been returned for not sufficient funds (NSF). On April 27 and 28, messages were left at the respondent's law office concerning this matter. During the evening of April 27, 1999 the auto dealership's salesman spoke with respondent at the respondent's residence. The respondent stated that the bank had made a mistake and that he would take care of the matter the next day, April 28, 1999.

4. On April 28 and 29, staff at the auto dealership contacted the bank and learned that the respondent's checking account did not have sufficient funds to cover the check. The respondent did not return phone calls from the dealership concerning the NSF check. On April 30, a representative of Russell Chevrolet/Honda filed a sworn affidavit with the Sherwood Municipal Court requesting a felony Warrant of Arrest (Hot Check) be issued for respondent. On May 4, 1999, the Sherwood Municipal Court issued a felony warrant for the respondent's arrest.

5. On May 13, 1999, respondent was stopped by a policeman on Interstate 40 for speeding. A criminal records check disclosed the felony Warrant of Arrest for respondent. Respondent was arrested, served with the felony warrant and released.

6. On June 15, 1999, pursuant to an agreement with the Judicial Discipline & Disability Commission, respondent recused himself from presiding over all criminal cases until the outcome of the criminal charges that were pending against him. Respondent resumed presiding over criminal cases during the week of July 19, 1999.

7. Prior to the trial date, respondent paid full restitution in this matter and paid all of the associated court costs. On July 7, 1999, respondent pled Nolo Contendere to a reduced unclassified misdemeanor charge. He was then sentenced under Act 346 which allows for an expungement within one (1) year of a probated sentence. The matter was then closed.

8. Respondent was first notified of the complaint by letter dated June 7, 1999. After appropriate notice, preliminary investigative hearings concerning this complaint were held. A Probable Cause Hearing was conducted on September 17, 1999. Respondent and his counsel were present at the Probable Cause Hearing.

9. In September 17, 1999, the Commission found that probable cause existed for believing that there had been misconduct of a nature requiring Formal Disciplinary Hearing. The respondent and his counsel waived the right to a Formal Disciplinary Hearing and requested the Judicial Discipline and Disability Commission issue a reprimand.

II. FINAL DECISION AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The above constitutes violations of A.C.A. 16-10-410 (b)(3) by the Commission of conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation; violating A.C.A. 16-10-410 (b)(4) by the Commission of conduct that is prejudiced to the administration of justice; and violation A.C.A. 16-10-410 (b)(5), willful violation of the Code of Judicial Conduct, specifically Canons 1 and 2A of the Code of Judicial Conduct.

ORDER

It is therefore ordered that the respondent Judge Jim Bob Steel be reprimanded.

Respondent is hereby reprimanded.

By direction of the Judicial Discipline and Disability Commission

Date

James A. Badami
Executive Director and Attorney
for the Judicial Discipline & Disability Commission

Certificate of Service

The undersigned attorney states that he has on this 22nd day of November, 1999, served a copy of the foregoing Final Decision and Order by depositing a copy of the same in the United States mail properly addressed and with sufficient postage prepaid to insure delivery addressed as follows:

Stuart Vess
Attorney at Law
406 West Pershing
North Little Rock, Arkansas 72114

Warren Readnour
Special Counsel
Attorney General's Office
323 Center Street 11th Floor
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

James A. Badami, #93099

November 22, 1999

Stuart Vess
Attorney at Law
406 West Pershing
North Little Rock, Arkansas 72114

Warren Readnour
Special Counsel
Attorney General's Office
323 Center Street 11th Floor
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

RE: Case # 99-200 (Formal Disciplinary Hearing)

Dear Mr. Vess and Mr. Readnour:

On Friday November 19, 1999, the Judicial Discipline and Disability Commission accepted the offer tendered by Judge Jim Bob Steel in the resolution of this matter.

Enclosed is the Final Decision and Order which includes the reprimand to Judge Steel. It is anticipated that the Final Decision and Order will be filed with the clerk of the Arkansas Supreme Court in the next few days.

Sincerely yours,

James A. Badami
Executive Director

cc: Larry Jegley , 6th Judicial District Prosecuting Attorney

Judge Jim Bob Steel

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