

Senate opens rare impeachment trial against federal judge

Staff Reports

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WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge from Louisiana is corrupt and unfit to serve on the bench, House members said Monday as they began a rare congressional impeachment trial by laying out their case against the jurist.

Playing the role of prosecutors, Reps. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., and Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., used their opening statements to a Senate impeachment panel to outline what they said was a decades-long pattern of unethical behavior by U.S. District Judge G. Thomas Porteous. They said that included taking cash, expensive meals and gifts from lawyers and a bail bondsman, lying to Congress, and filing for bankruptcy under a false name.

Schiff said allowing Porteous to remain on the bench would make a mockery of the judicial system.

Porteous' attorneys denied some allegations but acknowledged others, such as his accepting meals. They said the judge's behavior, while perhaps reflecting poor judgment, doesn't warrant impeachment, with attorney Jonathan Turley saying Porteous' actions do not meet the "high crimes and misdemeanors" standard in the Constitution.

"Judge Porteous has never been indicted, let alone convicted, of any crime," Turley said. "What the Congress has impeached this judge for is an appearance of impropriety."

Turley said Porteous plans to retire next year regardless of what happens.

The Senate trial is the first since the 1999 case against former President Bill Clinton. Porteous would be just the eighth judge to be impeached and convicted by Congress.

The House voted unanimously in March to impeach Porteous. A two-thirds vote is needed in the Senate to convict him.

Senators hearing the case appear ready to resolve it quickly, scheduling a series of all-day hearings this week and next.