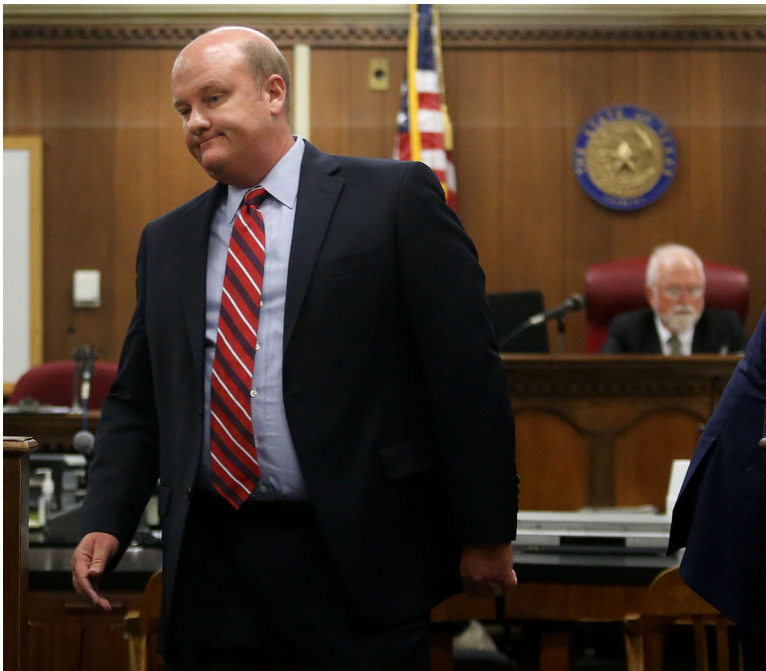


http://www.wacotrib.com/news/courts_and_trials/county-commissioner-jones-pleads-guilty-gets-fine-community-service/article_3d4a22b1-a622-5f0d-a436-bf6a7e04aa67.html

County Commissioner Jones pleads guilty, gets fine, community service

By CASSIE L. SMITH csmith@wacotrib.com May 5, 2017

Jones



Staff photo — Jerry Larson

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McLennan County Commissioner Will Jones leaves court Friday after pleading guilty, in exchange for deferred adjudication probation, to making an improper offer during his primary campaign. Jones offered to personally refund his opponent's \$1,250 filing fee if his opponent would drop out of the Republican primary race. In addition to a year of probation, Jones must serve 80 hours of community service and pay a \$4,000 fine.

McLennan County Commissioner Will Jones pleaded guilty Friday to offering a gift to a public servant.

Jones, commissioner for Precinct 3, entered the guilty plea for the Class A misdemeanor charge and was sentenced to one year of deferred adjudication probation, 80 hours of community service and fined \$4,000. Jones' attorneys and prosecutors agreed to the punishment in exchange for the guilty plea, and a judge signed off on the deal Friday.

Jones apologized for his actions in a statement after the leaving a hearing in 54th State District Court.

“I was wrong to offer to refund my opponent’s filing fee back,” Jones wrote in the statement. “Ignorance of the law is not a defense. Therefore, I accept the consequences of my actions. I have been open and honest from the beginning. I am honored that the voters re-elected me despite the negative coverage in the news media about my actions. I look forward to continuing my work as county commissioner and will serve the citizens of Precinct 3 and all of McLennan County to the best of my ability.”

A Class A misdemeanor is punishable by up to a year in prison and a \$4,000 fine.

In deferred probation cases, there is no final judgment of guilt and no final conviction on the defendant’s record if he or she successfully completes the term of probation.

Texas law requires officeholders convicted of crimes involving official misconduct to resign from office, but Jones will not have a conviction if he completes his deferred adjudication probation.

Visiting State District Judge James Morgan heard the case because Judge Matt Johnson recused himself. Morgan said he had to admit he had to get out the penal code and look up the charge of offering a gift to a public servant.

Jones was arrested in March for making an improper offer to reimburse his 2015 Republican primary opponent’s \$1,250 filing fee. The offer was for Ben Matus to drop out of the race.

The attorney general’s office agreed to prosecute Jones after McLennan County District Attorney Abel Reyna recused his office and asked the Texas Rangers to investigate, six months after the offer.

Jones admitted in January 2016 he made the offer to Matus. He called it “a simple business transaction.” Matus taped his phone conversations with Jones and saved text messages, which he shared with the Tribune-Herald.

Jones defeated Matus, a Texas State Technical College auto repair instructor, in the primary with 56 percent of the vote. Jones won 83 percent of the vote in the November general election against Libertarian challenger David Reichert.

As defined by the Texas Penal Code, a person commits the offense of offering a gift to a public servant if the person offers, confers or agrees to confer any benefit on a public servant that the person knows the public servant is prohibited by law from accepting. A political candidate is considered a public servant.

The plea hearing was postponed in April because the prosecutor was dealing with an unexpected health issue.

Jim Dunnam, Jones’ attorney, said after the hearing that Jones will be glad to get this behind him.

“He stepped up and accepted responsibility,” Dunnam said.



Commissioner charged in election offer



Commissioner set for plea hearing on misdemeanor charge in election case