

Investiture of Chief Justice Waller is January 8 in Jackson

January 5, 2009

An investiture ceremony for Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice William L. Waller Jr. is scheduled for 11 a.m. Jan. 8, 2009, in the En Banc Courtroom of the Gartin Justice Building in Jackson. Justice Waller has assumed the duties of Chief Justice, the chief administrative officer of the state court system.

Chief Justice James W. Smith Jr., who has held the state's highest judicial office since April 2004, left the bench on Dec. 31, 2008.

Court of Appeals Chief Judge Leslie D. King of Greenville will administer the oath of office to Chief Justice Waller during the investiture.

Gov. Haley Barbour will be the keynote speaker. Mississippi Bar President Rodger Wilder of Gulfport will deliver a response on behalf of the Bar.

Presiding Justice George C. Carlson Jr. of Batesville will call the investiture to order and serve as the master of ceremonies. Rev. Stan Buckley, senior pastor of First Baptist Church Jackson, will deliver the invocation. Members of the Mississippi Army and Air Guard will post the colors. The First Baptist Church Jackson Troop 8, Boy Scouts of America, will lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Kathy Baxter Gautier of Madison will sing the national anthem. Presiding Justice James E. Graves Jr. of Jackson will welcome and recognize special guests. Retired Court of Appeals Judge Mary Libby Payne of Pearl will give brief remarks about the history of the office of Chief Justice. Rev. Timothy Howard, senior pastor of Anderson South United Methodist Church in Jackson, will deliver the benediction.

In his investiture speech, Chief Justice Waller will address the need for justice to be administered fairly and efficiently.

Justice Waller believes the courts of Mississippi should be open to all citizens. Justice Waller will continue the Court's leadership in support of the Access to Justice Commission, which was created in 2006 to develop a unified strategy to improve access to the civil courts for the poor. Through his work on the Supreme Court Rules Committee, he supported court rule changes which increased funding for civil legal assistance for the poor.

Chief Justice Waller said, "We need to make sure that money generated for indigent civil legal assistance is delivered in the most cost effective manner to the greatest number of indigent citizens possible."

Justice Waller believes the Code of Judicial Conduct should be fully studied, with special attention given to provisions related to judicial campaigns. "A full review of the Code of Judicial Conduct, with emphasis on election provisions, is needed to protect and enhance public confidence in our system of justice," he said.

Justice Waller wants to complete development and begin implementation of the Mississippi Electronic Court System. A pilot project is currently being operated in Madison County Chancery Court. The Mississippi Electronic Court System is based on the electronic case filing and case management system used by federal courts.

Justice Waller believes the courts need to continue to seek innovative ways to reduce litigation costs and shorten time for resolution of legal claims. “There is currently being tested in the County Courts of Rankin, Jones and Lee counties the Expedited Small Claims procedures, which have great potential for decreasing costs and speeding up the resolution of claims,” he said.

Chief Justice Waller, 56, of Jackson, has served on the Supreme Court since January 1998. He was a presiding justice for five years, and chaired the Supreme Court Rules Committee for eight years.

As a member of the Court, Justice Waller has sought to bring reforms in the administration of justice. He supported adoption by the Supreme Court of mediation rules for civil litigation and served as chairman of the Mississippi Public Defender Task Force from 2000 to 2005. He was principal architect of what became legislation which created the Office of Capital Post-Conviction Counsel, the Office of Indigent Appeals and the Comprehensive Electronic Court System Fund. He previously served as chairman of the Lawyer Referral Service for the Mississippi Bar and as a member of the Judicial Study Commission.

He is the eldest son of former Gov. Bill Waller Sr. and Carroll Overton Waller. He was in private law practice in the firm of Waller and Waller in Jackson from 1977 to January 1998. He served as municipal judge for the City of Jackson from January 1995 until July 1996.

He completed 33 years of service in the military, attaining the rank of Brigadier General while serving as Commander of the 66th Troop Command, Mississippi Army National Guard.

He is a native of Jackson and a graduate of Murrah High School. He received his undergraduate degree in general business with emphasis in finance, tax and insurance from Mississippi State University in 1974. He received his law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law in 1977.

Justice Waller and his wife, Charlotte, have three children. They are members of First Baptist Church Jackson, where he is a deacon. He previously served as chairman of the deacons.

The investiture will be webcast on the Supreme Court’s Internet web site, www.mssc.state.ms.us.

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