

Indicted DA pleads guilty

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Former Bullock and Barbour County District Attorney Sam LeMaistre Jr. pleaded guilty to two federal counts of mail fraud Thursday and faces up to \$500,000 in fines and 10 years in federal prison.



LeMaistre

U.S. District Judge Truman Hobbs withheld a motion to dismiss several extortion charges against the former prosecutor pending his cooperation in an FBI investigation into white-collar crime in Alabama.

LeMaistre, 39, also resigned as 3rd Judicial Circuit of Alabama District Attorney where he had served for 10 years, and surrendered his license to practice law.

The original extortion counts

against LeMaistre, charging he was paid \$5,000 to have charges dismissed in a case in his district, said Charysse Alexander, assistant U.S. attorney. Officials said this additional count may have influenced the guilty plea.

"It is not acceptable to have crooks in public office," said U.S. Attorney James E. Wilson in a news conference Thursday.

LeMaistre first was indicted with two other officers in December by a federal grand jury on charges that he extorted \$18,800 from two men in exchange for dropping criminal charges against them. LeMaistre pleaded not guilty to the three counts of extortion.

The FBI began investigations in September 1990 when two confidential sources tipped off agents.

Mr. Wilson added 12 additional counts in January, alleging LeMaistre extorted more than \$60,000 from defendants between March 1989 and Sept. 1990. LeMaistre also pleaded innocent to the additional charges.

The other two officers, Eufaula Police Capt. Earlie Lee Dinkins Jr. and former Eufaula police officer William John Tyrrell pleaded guilty to five counts of extortion each in late January. Four were later dismissed. The two were expected to testify against LeMaistre at his trial Monday.

Dinkins was charged Feb. 7 with bribery, distributing cocaine and stealing a shotgun and turned himself in to the Barbour County sheriff.

Judge Hobbs heard LeMaistre's plea Thursday in Federal Court, but the details of that plea agreement are temporarily sealed by a court order.

LeMaistre has already agreed

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questions," Mr. Wilson said.

Between April 1988 and November 1990, LeMaistre diverted about \$9,000 from the Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Commission Fund and the Child Support Enforcement Fund for his personal use. Each check serves as one federal count of mail fraud.

Judge Hobbs will sentence LeMaistre at a later date.

Attorney General Jimmy Evans said the appropriate offices of public accountants have been notified of the case and will begin investigating restitution requirements for LeMaistre.

Mr. Evans or one of his assistant attorneys general will handle all state prosecutions arising in LeMaistre's former district until Gov. Guy Hunt appoints a new district attorney.

"This will send a message to all public officials," said First Assistant U.S. Attorney D. Bro-

ward Segrest. Mr. Segrest was the lead prosecutor on the case.

FBI Special Agents said Thursday that white-collar crime and public corruption have become high priority investigations in the middle and southern districts.

"As I said when he was indicted, I hoped he wasn't guilty," said Bullock County Probate Judge Rufus C. Huffman. "I re-

gret that he allowed himself to stoop that low. He has betrayed the trust of the people.

"Someone who thinks so low of moral ethics — it's devastating to