Reams says he retired, not resigned

County attorney claims he retired and not resigned

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BRENTWOOD — Rockingham County Attorney James Reams agreed yesterday to step down, appointing Patricia Conway as deputy county attorney until a replacement is named.

It marked the end of Reams’ tumultuous 15-year career as the county’s top lawyer.

The three-member county commission announced yesterday afternoon it reached a settlement with Reams that he resign, paying the remainder of his $85,000-a-year salary through Jan. 1. That comes to about $42,000, Commissioner Kevin Coyle said.

But Reams, 66, disputed the commission’s account, saying he agreed to retire and that it was “erroneous” to say he resigned.

“It’s a crock,” he said. “I did not resign, I’m retiring. ... I’m retiring because they made it worth my while.”

Attorney General Joseph Foster confirmed Reams is retiring and said his office will no longer pursue the county attorney’s removal from office. A hearing on the matter was scheduled for Aug. 4 in Merrimack Superior Court in Concord, but will be canceled.

Before leaving office, Reams notified the state’s legislative delegation that Conway would oversee the office in the interim.

Conway is an assistant county attorney and one of five people running to replace Reams in the September primary after he decided not to seek re-election.

The County Commission voted, 2-1, to accept the agreement, with Coyle and Thomas Tombarello in favor and Chairwoman Katharin Pratt in opposition.

The 46 members of the county’s legislative delegation must now decide if they want to replace Reams and who that person would be, commissioners said. Delegation Chairman Norman Major, R-Plaistow, said a meeting would be scheduled, but he didn’t know when.

The Attorney General’s Office has offered to have one of its attorneys run the office in the interim, Foster said.

Reams was suspended by commissioners in November and his prosecutorial authority stripped by Foster amid allegations he mismanaged county money and sexually harassed female employees.