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COMMISSIONER CAVANAUGH'S PUBLIC STATEMENT REGARDING THE ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION AT THE SEPTEMBER COMMISSION MEETING

At the Alabama Public Service Commission we usually find ourselves occupied with matters of utility rates, technical reports and other regulatory issues, but today we were confronted with a difficult personnel matter involving a 21 year state employee.

 As a result of a routine audit, we found that a Public Service Commission cell phone was improperly used to make personal calls. After a thorough investigation, there is no denying this staffer made a mistake by going over the allotted minutes and by discussing personal matters on a state-owned phone.

As the one who pushed our new PSC ethics rules through this commission, it would probably be politically smart for me to bang my hand on the table, talk about a zero tolerance policy and toss this employee out the door. But this is one of those cases where the right thing clearly outweighs political posturing.

This was a serious infraction that deserves serious punishment, and today we handed down the strictest punishment available short of dismissal. We had to make a decision that is consistent with the precedent of past personnel decisions. To do otherwise would invite more disruption at the commission and potentially impact pending personnel matters.

I always remember that I work for the people of this state and do not make any decision without considering every angle possible, and that is why we demanded a serious punishment. I believe that termination in this case would amount to assigning life in prison in a jaywalking case. Today, I strived to be the voice of reason in a tense situation, and I believe that the end result was justice for everyone involved.