

Nichols case judge given some help

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McALESTER -- Eight judges will help cover the regular docket of District Judge Steven Taylor as he handles Oklahoma bombing conspirator Terry Nichols' state murder trial.

Opening statements are scheduled to begin Monday at the Pittsburg County Courthouse in Nichols' trial on 161 first-degree murder charges stemming from the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

Oklahoma Supreme Court Chief Justice Joseph M. Watt said he and Taylor met several months before the actual beginning of the trial to discuss how other judges could assist with Taylor's docket so that he could "devote his full attention and efforts to the Nichols matter."

Judges who will help cover Taylor's regular docket include retired District Judge Lyle Burris of Muskogee County, District Judge Gary Snow of Seminole County, District Judge Thomas S. Walker of Carter County, Associate District Judge Richard E. Branam of Coal County, Associate District Judge Michael Claver of Okmulgee County, Associate District Judge Ted A. Knight of LeFlore County, Associate District Judge David Martin of Okfuskee County and Associate District Judge Bill D. Welch of Latimer County.

"The judiciary in Oklahoma has always stepped up to the plate and helped one another in times like these, and I am grateful to these eight judges who have offered their judicial expertise," Watt said.

Pittsburg County Associate District Judge Thomas Bartheld and Special Judge Jim D. Bland also have taken on additional daily responsibilities at the Pittsburg County Courthouse to assist Taylor.

Estimates on the length of Nichols' trial range from four to six months.