

Cooper's sentence postponed

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By Rudi Keller

With his lawyer pleading for more time because of a conflict with another case, U.S. District Judge Jean C. Hamilton granted former state representative Nathan Cooper's request for a delay in his sentencing on federal immigration charges.

But Hamilton didn't grant the full delay sought by Cooper and his attorney, Joel Schwartz of St. Louis. Instead of 30 days, Hamilton delayed the sentencing by a week, from Oct. 19 to Oct. 26.

Cooper pleaded guilty Aug. 9 to creating shell companies to hide the real employers of foreign truck drivers and to purchasing temporary worker visas intended for hospitality workers for use by the drivers. Since entering the plea, Cooper, a Republican, has resigned from the Missouri House, been suspended from the practice of law and ordered to pay \$50,000 to settle a federal forfeiture claim against the financial gains from his actions.

The U.S. attorney's office for the Eastern District of Missouri did not object to the delay, prosecutor Jim Crowe said Tuesday.

"We typically don't have any objection" when an attorney has a conflict, Crowe said. "That is more of a professional courtesy thing."

In his court filing, Schwartz said he has a jury trial beginning Oct. 19 in Washington County and he's preparing for jury trials in three St. Louis criminal cases.

"Counsel feels this continuance is necessary to properly prepare for defendant's sentencing," Schwartz wrote.

In a brief interview Tuesday, Cooper said the request for postponement was based entirely on Schwartz's scheduling conflicts. "It was just typical within the court process," he said.

Cooper faces a maximum of 15 years in federal prison. He has cooperated with investigators, and attorneys for both sides have said they expect Cooper will be sentenced to 30 to 37 months.

A special election will be held Feb. 5 in the 158th District, which includes most of Cape Girardeau, to select Cooper's replacement. The candidates include former state representative Mary Kasten, a Republican, former Cape Girardeau postmaster Mike Keefe, a Democrat, and health-care information technology employee George Webster, a Libertarian.

Candidates wishing to run as independents have until Nov. 15 to submit petitions with the signatures of 239 registered voters to the Missouri secretary of state.