

DAILY NEWS
Breaking News

Feb 5, 10:36 PM EST

Embattled Alaska Attorney General Resigns

By MATT VOLZ
Associated Press Writer

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) -- The state attorney general announced his resignation Saturday after months of battling criticism for alleged ethics breaches while shaping an international trade deal.

Republican Gregg Renkes said he wanted to shield his family "from the vicious politics of personal destruction."

"I must leave this office and this privilege I have treasured and held dear. A family is priceless; a job can be done by others," Renkes said in a statement.

Renkes was to step down Monday after submitting a formal letter of resignation to Republican Gov. Frank Murkowski, who planned to appoint an acting attorney general next week. The governor accepted Renkes' verbal resignation.

"Gregg's decision to resign was his own, and I respect that decision," Murkowski said in a statement issued Saturday evening.

Renkes held stock in KFx Inc., a company that has patented a process it claims makes coal cleaner and more efficient.

The company stood to benefit from an international coal deal between Alaska and Taiwan that Renkes played a major role in shaping. A report released last month by former U.S. Attorney Robert Bundy concluded his stake was not significant enough to be considered an ethics breach.

Bundy said, however, that Renkes violated Alaska ethics law by not seeking an outside opinion on his involvement in the Alaska-Taiwan agreement.

The value of Renkes' KFx stock was about \$100,000 when he sold it in October, after news reports surfaced of his holdings.

Criticism of Renkes continued after the report. Last week, Murkowski issued a letter of reprimand, but said he would not ask for the attorney general's resignation.

A call to Renkes' cell phone was not immediately returned. Renkes was traveling and was not available to comment, spokesman Mark Morones said.



"I think he's just tired. It's taken a big toll on him," Morones said.

Republican House Speaker John Harris said he believed Renkes' character had been attacked "viciously and mercilessly," making it difficult for the attorney general to perform his duties.

"I'm disappointed that Gregg had to resign because I like him personally, but I do understand because there was so much interest in it. I don't think he could legitimately focus on his job anymore."

Renkes' legal advice has repeatedly generated controversy since he was appointed by Murkowski in 2002.

He was point man for a Murkowski proposal to abolish the state agency that oversees campaign finance and lobbying activities, the Alaska Public Offices Commission. Renkes contended the commission was slow to resolve complaints and that it appeared to be influenced by partisan politics. The measure failed.

After the Alaska Court of Appeals ruled Alaskans could possess up to 4 ounces of marijuana in their homes, Renkes ordered state police to continue to seize and treat as evidence all marijuana found - even if it was under 4 ounces.

Renkes appealed the ruling and was denied a rehearing by that court and the Alaska Supreme Court.