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## House approves inquiry of judge

By **SUZANNE GAMBOA** Associated Press Writer © 2009  
The Associated Press

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WASHINGTON — The House took the first step Tuesday toward an impeachment process for a Texas federal judge who is headed to prison for lying about groping female employees.

The House passed a resolution introduced by Reps. John Conyers, D-Mich., and Lamar Smith, R-Texas, to start an investigative inquiry of Judge Samuel Kent of Galveston.

The inquiry will determine whether the House should impeach him. Conyers is the Democratic chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and Smith is the ranking Republican.

Smith declined comment Tuesday. A spokesman for Conyers could not be immediately reached.

The House must vote on the resolution to begin the inquiry, which could eventually lead to hearings and votes on whether Kent should be impeached.

Both lawmakers had insisted Kent resign on Monday after he was sentenced to nearly three years in prison. He had pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice in February as jury selection was about to begin for his trial on the obstruction charge and five sex-crime charges.

The five other charges were dismissed Monday.

Kent's lawyer, Dick DeGuerin of Houston, has said the judge has retired. That allows him to continue receiving his salary, \$169,300 annual salary, which Conyers and Smith oppose.

Federal judges must be at least 65 before they can retire and reaching that age allows them to still collect their full salaries for the remainder of their lives. Kent is 59. A federal judge who resigns gets nothing.

The only way a younger judge could retire and still collect his salary would be to claim a disability, either mental or physical. DeGuerin has said Kent retired with a disability.

Kent has been ordered to surrender to authorities June 15 and must serve three years' probation once his sentence is completed. He also was ordered to participate in an alcohol-abuse program while in prison.

He also was fined \$1,000 and ordered to pay \$6,550 in restitution to the secretary and case manager whose complaints resulted in the first sex abuse case against a sitting federal judge.

As part of the plea agreement, Kent admitted the sexual contact was against the women's will.

The House Judiciary Committee was to consider the Kent investigation Wednesday while it deals with an ongoing inquiry of Louisiana federal judge Thomas Porteous.

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