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COURT CONVICTS CREEL OF DRIVING DRUNK

GEOFF PENDER/The Sun Herald

BILOXI --- State Rep. Jamie Creel must pay a \$1,170 fine, undergo assessment for alcohol or substance abuse and serve 12 months probation for driving drunk in November 1999.

Thursday's Biloxi City Court ruling comes 10 days after the Coast legislator fled the scene of an accident in Jackson. The crash left two women injured outside a popular bar in the capital city. Creel paid \$631.50 in fines for leaving the scene. City Court Judge W. Eugene Henry on Thursday sentenced Creel to two days in jail, but suspended the sentence provided he does not violate the terms of his probation. If that substance-abuse assessment determines that Creel needs treatment, it will be required as part of his probation.

The judge also found Creel guilty of driving without a proper car tag at the time of his November arrest and fined him another \$150.

Henry ruled against Creel's argument that police lacked probable cause to stop his car before his November arrest.

Creel refused a breath test to determine whether he was under the influence of alcohol, a violation of state law that allows law enforcement authorities to take a blood sample at a hospital. Results of that test were not available late Thursday.

Neither Creel nor his attorney could be reached for comment.

Creel's sentence and fine in City Court is standard, said **Wayne Woodall**, one of the Coast's premier DUI defense lawyers. **Woodall** was not involved in Creel's case.

"You can expect that in every case you get," **Woodall** said of Creel's sentence. "No breaks. Nothing unusual."

Biloxi City Attorney Ronnie Cochran said that, if anything, Creel's sentence was a little harsher than some people receive.

"There are two differences," Cochran said. "(Creel) was given no credit on his fine. Usually, the judge will reduce the amount of the fine, subject to the defendant meeting all the terms of the ruling. Secondly, therapy or counseling is not usually required on a first DUI offense. To that extent, this was a little harsher than the norm."

Court records show that two other drunken driving charges against Creel --- one in 1994 and

another in 1995 --- were reduced to reckless driving.

Creel, who was elected to the District 115 seat last year, admitted having several drinks and issued an apology after his November DUI arrest, but stated, "I certainly believed that I was driving responsibly and was not a threat to anyone, including myself."

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PHOTO BY: JAMES EDWARD BATES/THE SUN HERALD

State Rep. Jamie Creel, shown during the legislative session at the Capitol in January, was convicted Thursday of drunken driving. The conviction was one of several traffic violations for the first-term legislator.

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