

Judge back in public eye for all the wrong reasons

Nottingham has undercut his reputation by illegally parking in a handicapped spot and dropping thousands at a strip club.

By The Denver Post Editorial Board

Chief Federal Judge Edward Nottingham was in the news again over the weekend, and again the reports were disappointing for someone of his stature.

Nottingham illegally parked in a handicapped parking space in September. A woman who uses a wheelchair describes a contentious scene with the judge. He has said little publicly, other than to broadly dispute her version of events.

It's impossible from our vantage point to know the truth of what happened after he parked illegally. That will be something for judges in the disciplinary process to determine. But it's distressing to hear Nottingham was again involved in a situation that puts him in the public eye for all the wrong reasons.

In August, we learned Nottingham had dropped thousands of dollars in one night at a strip club. Granted, so far as we know there was nothing illegal about what he did. He was embarrassed about the revelations, which came out of a bitter divorce, and said they were a matter of "human frailties and foibles."

In the most recent incident, Nottingham parked in a handicapped space outside the Walgreens on Colfax Avenue and Race Street. He said he was making a quick stop to pick up a prescription. A woman who uses a wheelchair blocked Nottingham's SUV from leaving the spot and contends he put the car in reverse and threatened to have federal marshals remove her.

The woman, Jeanne Elliott, was a lawyer in an Arapahoe County courtroom in 1986 when she was shot and paralyzed by an angry litigant. She has filed a complaint about the parking incident with the 10th U.S. Court of Appeals.

In a brief and broadly worded statement, the judge admitted the parking violation but disagreed with the rest of Elliott's description of how the events unfolded.

Were he an ordinary guy, a strip club visit and a parking ticket wouldn't make for much news. But Nottingham is not just another guy.

Federal judges have great power to decide the fate of people and cases that come before them. We look to them to decide some of the most important issues of our day. They should abide by the law, even simple ones, such as where to park.

It pains us to see Nottingham, who has a reputation for being an exacting professional, in this situation. The judiciary has been under attack in recent years. We hear accusations all the time about "activist judges" who write law from the bench, or imperial judges who believe they have unquestioned authority.

The incidents Nottingham has been involved in — though they have nothing to do with his ability to preside over a case — provide fodder for those with an anti-judiciary agenda.

We hope that at some point, the judge speaks publicly about his version of events, so people will have both sides of the story. We also hope the chief judge finds a way to avoid the kind of activity that brings him all the wrong attention.