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## Eggleston's claims against Bieluch head to federal court

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Ken Eggleston's claims that his law enforcement career was ruined by a vindictive sheriff goes to trial in federal court this week after being debated for the past three years in news headlines and political forums.

Eggleston contends Sheriff Ed Bieluch

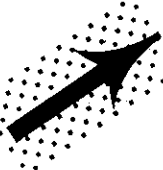
violated his constitutional rights of free speech and equal protection when he fired him in 2002 for campaigning for political office while on duty.

The trial, expected to run eight to 10 days, is scheduled to start in Miami early this week before U.S. District Judge Joan Lenard. "We are very confident that, based on the evidence, we

should clearly prevail," said Gerald Richman, Eggleston's attorney.

Bieluch and an attorney for the sheriff's office say Eggleston's claims that he was a dedicated law enforcement officer caught in a political conspiracy don't ring true.

"I think his case is totally bogus,"



said Coral Gables attorney Robert Norton. "He's not a law enforcement person. He's a politician and that's all it's ever been about for him."

A former sheriff's sergeant, Eggleston returned to the agency as Bieluch's second-in-command, a reward for managing Bieluch's 2000 political campaign.

Eggleston maintains Bieluch agreed to serve one term and endorse Eggleston, but that Bieluch backed out and wanted his old friend gone. Eggleston said he had no

choice but to accept a demotion to captain and run for a congressional seat.

Bieluch claims Eggleston broke an agreement — and office policy — by mixing politics with his job. Eggleston said he broke no rules, saying he was fired because the sheriff supported U.S. Rep. Mark Foley, R-Jupiter, the incumbent that Eggleston wanted to unseat. The only suspense in the trial may be whether Bieluch will be allowed to identify himself as an Anglican deacon, his avocation since departing the sheriff's office in January.

Eggleston's attorneys say the disclosure to jurors could be prejudicial to their client. Bieluch's attorneys argued that his years-long quest to become a deacon is relevant because it shows he had no long-term political agenda that could be enhanced by firing a potential political rival.

Lenard has not ruled on the issue, nor on another motion filed by Eggleston to keep out evidence that he was fired from his first police job in Deerfield Beach because of allegations that he helped a fellow officer falsify a urine test for drugs.

Eggleston sued the city, which later exonerated him in the incident.

A central part of Eggleston's case against Bieluch is that his firing caused him emotional distress — including sleepless nights and hair loss — as well as costing him his career. Now working as a real estate salesman, Eggleston said he has tried for three years to find a law enforcement job but that Bieluch's actions put "a permanent stain" on his résumé.

In sworn testimony earlier this year, Eggleston said he had applied for jobs without success at sheriff's

offices in Hendry and St. Lucie counties, at the Wackenhut Corp. and as an assistant chief of North Bay Village in Miami-Dade County.

His candidacy last year for Palm Beach County sheriff also was undone in part by the controversy, he said. Eggleston was trounced by Ric Bradshaw, who took 57 percent of the vote.

"It became apparent that I would have to consider a change in my lifelong profession," Eggleston testified earlier this year.

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