

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

To Save Ray, Avery Explains

By WILLIAM BENNETT
From The Commercial Appeal
Nashville Bureau

NASHVILLE, May 30. — Former state Corrections Commissioner Harry Avery said Friday one of his principal motives in interviewing James Earl Ray was to determine "who we might protect him against" at the state prison.

He also said in a radio interview that he had told Ray if he would write the "full truth about his connection with the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I would deposit whatever was paid to him for that in his trust account at the prison."

Avery, fired Thursday by Gov. Buford Ellington, partly because of his dealings with Ray at the prison, said he had told Ray he would "not take one cent" of the money.

The former chief of the Corrections Department said he had in addition told Ray that if he had any money hidden away that he received as a prepayment for his part in the King killing he would get it and deposit it in his trust account as well.

Ray is reported to have told Avery he was "interested" in what he had to offer, but would not say whether he had any money hidden away.

"All I wanted to do was to tell the truth," Avery said. He said he was not necessarily "interested" that he was trying to solve the murder and added he was interested in finding who might try to harm Ray at the penitentiary.

W. E. Hopton, director of the Tennessee Bureau of Criminal Identification, who conducted an investigation into Avery's connection with Ray, continued to refuse to discuss details of the report he submitted to Ellington.

After he fired Avery, Ellington said details of the TBI report would not be made public.

Part of the investigation centered about a call Avery said he received telling of a plot on Ray's life in prison. It has been reliably reported the call was from a crank and few if any officials took it seriously.

The governor ordered the investigation after it was reported Avery had on three occasions interviewed Ray in his maximum security cell, gathering material for a book.

Avery insisted he never intended to write a book about Ray as long as he was commissioner.

Before telling Hopton to make the inquiry, Ellington issued a statement saying no state official would be permitted to use his position for personal gain.

At a press conference following his dismissal, Avery had explained his interviews with Ray by saying discussions with the much-publicized prisoner were natural to him in view of his long career as an investigator.

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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