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THIRTEEN

LOUISIANA POLITICS

DA's Persistence Paid; Public Is Closer to Truth

By BILL LYNCH

(States-Item Bureau)

BATON ROUGE—It took an awful lot of persistence and insistence, but perseverance finally paid off for East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney Sargent Pitcher in his quest for records of a telephone link between rackets figures and the state capitol.

When he first received a request from Gov. John J. McKeithen to conduct a probe of the alleged calls between a number in an office purportedly that of Carlos Marcello and a phone in the speaker of the House office Pitcher received virtually no cooperation from a number of agencies.

The most vital link in the calls was the actual records themselves and these were bottled up for nearly eight months.

Despite a series of subpoenas, the telephone company produced only a few records of no consequence and none involving the dates mentioned in the probe. It had destroyed them as part of a company policy not to keep them for more than six months. In fact, the company did not even know, it said, if anyone had obtained them.

Despite this, Pitcher persisted in trying to locate them. He resisted pressure from the governor's office to issue a final report on his probe at a time when the States-Item revealed that a simultaneous investigation being conducted by another state agency had been dropped.

INFORMATION THAT the Justice Department had the records and that the Queens County, New York, district attorney had been trying to get them failed to turn up the documents.

However, through his connections Pitcher discovered that the FBI had, indeed, subpoenaed the records and that the Senate investigating committee on wiretapping had also been after them. The FBI, it turned

out, had turned the records over to the Justice Department. Pitcher had been trying to get them from the Justice agency by working through normal channels with lower echelon officials.

Then he decided to go directly to Attorney General Ramsey Clark and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. From the latter he learned the records had been obtained. Still, the Justice Department would not cooperate. It delayed answering requests and skirted the issue when Pitcher asked for help.

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IT HAD SEEMED apparent from the outset that a clique in the Justice Department was determined not to turn the records loose. Then stories began appearing about the Justice Department's reluctance and tie-ins with the James Hoffa-Edward Grady Partin affair.

Pitcher refused to give up when the Justice Department said that the FBI had destroyed its copies of the toll records and only made a resume of its findings. For one thing, the district attorney did not believe it and he fired in a request to see the resume.



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Then things began to fall into place. The governor, tired of all the adverse publicity on the telephone business, assigned an investigator from state police to initiate a new probe completely. The phone company then "found" records it did not think it had and the Justice Department produced a copy of the FBI resume.

The records are now being examined and their importance will be related in time, if any significance exists. No indictments may ever result. For one thing it will be difficult to prove any crime in a telephone conversation.

But one thing is clear, and the public ought to know it—because of the persistence of District Attorney Pitcher, the public is a

little closer to the truth.

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WHILE HANDING OUT bouquets, some are in store for the employes of the Division of Administration who broke their pencil points producing the executive budget for fiscal 1968-69 and the capital improvements five-year budget.

It was a monumental task and much of the credit should go to N. P. Himbert, commissioner of administration, and Benny Turcan, the veteran budget officer.

There may be a number of mistakes and boo boos, considering the enormity of the job, but in the overall picture it was a well-done task. Both documents have far more information in them than do any previous budgets produced by the agency and it had less time than usual to produce them.

The division might be in for some criticism too, employing two assistant commissioners at \$17,500 a year. Both men are ex-military officers and associated with Sen. Jamar Adcock of Monroe, whose voice in fiscal matters is very strong.

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THE LEGISLATURE MOVES into its third week and there is a strong undercurrent of opposition building up to the governor's \$119 million tax-raising program. The opposition is stemming from a failure by the administration to explain the need for the additional revenues adequately.

A record budget of \$1.47 billion (including the tax raises) and a \$500 million bond program can make the sturdiest legislator shudder. On top of all the poor mouthing about needed revenues to take care of the state's needs come requests for major salary raises by nearly everyone, including all of the elected state officials.

Further, it was a bit shocking to hear the governor brag to legislators about plans to spend \$40 million on off-system highway work that should be done by parishes and municipalities.

It is strictly pork barrel legislation of the worst sort, providing lawmakers with projects to dish out in their respective areas. It has little relation to need or priority—just plain politics. Naturally, it is popular with lawmakers themselves who otherwise might have little to take home to their constituents.

The Public Affairs Research Council advised that if off-system roads and streets are to be included in state allocations, then the state should provide a program for maintaining them, doing it on a basis of reason.

The \$40 million pork barrel will cost another \$40 million in interest.