

Tennessee Governor's Assistants Resign in Parole Sales Scandal

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NASHVILLE, Tenn., Dec. 18 (AP)—Gov. Ray Blanton said today he has accepted the resignations of two assistants arrested on federal charges of extortion and conspiracy to sell paroles, commutations and extraditions.

Blanton, who leaves office in January, said the resignations of his legal counsel, T. Edward Sisk, and extradition officer, Charles Benson, were effective immediately.

"... If they are proved to be guilty as charged, this incident will be a great affront to the dignity of all Tennesseans," the governor said.

The resignations came as Blanton, Sisk, a third aide and a cabinet member were ordered to appear Tuesday in Chancery Court to defend the practice of having an assistant sign Blanton's name to documents granting prisoners' release.

Sisk, Benson and a veteran Tennessee Highway Patrol officer, who has been suspended without pay, were arrested late Friday. Through press secretary Jim Gilchrist, Blanton said he was "shocked and saddened by this matter."

In Memphis, meanwhile, FBI agent Ben Hale said "the investigation of alleged parole-selling was going ahead full steam," but investigators declined to speculate on further arrests.

Tuesday's hearing was ordered by Chancellor Robert S. Brandt at the request of District Attorney Tom Shriver of Nashville and John J. Hooker, twice a Democratic candidate for governor.

In addition to questioning the legality or releasing prisoners on executive clemency papers signed for Blanton by an assistant, Shriver and Hooker asked that no more prisoners be released without court permission.

Ordered to appear in addition to Blanton and Sisk were Ken Lavender, the governor's appointments secretary, and C. Murray Henderson, his correction commissioner.

Sisk, 38, is one of those arrested by the FBI late Friday. The others were Benson, 33, Sisk's extradition assistant, and Lt. Charles Frederick Taylor, 40, a state Highway Patrol officer whom the FBI identified as a member of Blanton's security staff.

The FBI complaint said Benson had legal papers bearing Blanton's name calling for the early release of Larry Ed Hacker, a burglar and reputed ring-leader of the 1977 escape from Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary of James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

At the time of their arrests, the FBI said Benson and Sisk had marked money with them that was given by an unidentified FBI informant for Hacker's release. The FBI quoted Taylor as telling the informant the price for Hacker's freedom would be \$100,000.