

Audit Report On Ourso Files Due Next Week

BATON ROUGE (AP) — An audit report of Iberville Parish Sheriff Jessel Ourso's accounts is expected next week and may be a first step in his suspension from office.

The Associated Press learned yesterday that Legislative Auditor J. B. Lancaster was preparing the report at the request of Gov. John McKeithen.

THE state began removal proceedings yesterday, charging Ourso with corruption, intimidation and harassment in labor affairs "unparalleled in the history of this state."

The audit report would be sufficient to suspend Ourso if it shows him to be in arrears in financial dealings.

A source close to McKeithen said such a suspension "is possible." The state constitution empowers the governor to suspend a sheriff whose office is in arrears, on the recommendation of the state comptroller or the parish police jury.

OURSO'S suspension was asked for by McKeithen and Atty. Gen. Jack Gremillion pending final determination of the ouster proceeding. Judge Daniel Kimball set March 6 for a hearing on the request.

Ourso, then 32, took office in 1963 after defeating 16-year incumbent Charles A. Griffon. He won re-election last year for a second term starting in July.

Before becoming sheriff, Ourso was resident state trooper in Iberville Parish for six years. Previously, he was a Baton Rouge policeman.

THE removal proceedings sought Ourso's ouster for "high crimes and misdemeanors, incompetency, corruption, favoritism, extortion, oppression in office and gross misconduct."

Ourso said he would study the allegations before replying but said he was "not guilty of any wrongdoing in connection with the administration of the public office I now hold."

The state also filed five more charges in connection with a labor clash at Plaquemine, the county seat, last month. A public bribery charge was filed against former state trooper J. J. Jackson and a charge of receiving stolen goods against Ivan Mendoza, brother of one of Ourso's deputies.

THE removal petition said Ourso set up a guard service, using deputy sheriff's uniforms and parish vehicles, for construction companies at the rate of \$3 an hour. The petition said Ourso received \$37,121 from the Badger Construction Co. for the guard service in one year.

The firm agreed to use the service after two lumber trucks disappeared mysteriously, the petition said.

In the spring of 1967, the removal proceedings charged, Ourso called the vice president of a natural gas construction company and chastised him for firing a secretary Ourso had placed on the payroll.

"I DON'T give a damn about your office, about the people you have employed in that office," the petition quoted Ourso as telling the official. "If you don't get it straight and keep me out of it, I will blow that office and everybody in it sky high."

The petition said Ourso refused to allow East Baton Rouge Parish deputies to question Mendoza in connection with the theft of two shotguns. The petition said Ourso told the deputies he was taking charge of the Mendoza case but never charged anyone and refused to cooperate with parish authorities.