

MAY 16 1972/61 9 L. AME

Partin Election Deal Rejected by Edwards

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BATON ROUGE — Gov. Edwin Edwards rejected a deal during the second Democratic primary election that would have given teamster boss Ed Partin patronage in the form of state jobs for two witnesses at his extortion trial.

Edwards confirmed to The States-Item that he was approached just prior to the run-off election by two men who claimed they represented Partin and wanted to make a deal in exchange for Partin publicly endorsing his democratic opponent, Sen. J. Bennett Johnston Jr.

Such an endorsement would not have benefitted Johnson, particularly in the Baton Rouge area where Partin has come under heavy fire, including federal grand jury indictment, for his activities in labor-management disputes.

THE GOVERNOR said that the incident occurred in the lobby of the Monteleone Hotel in New Orleans and he rejected the offer out of hand.

He said he had never seen the two men before, did not recall who they were and had only seen one of them since.

The two for whom Partin sought jobs were W. O. Bergeron and Roland Stevens, both of Baton Rouge, who were key witnesses at Partin's extortion trial in Atlanta. Partin was convicted by a jury, but the presiding judge later overturned the conviction and a new trial has been ordered.

Stevens told The States-Item that Partin had discussed with him the prospects of his being on the Contractors Licensing Board but that he (Stevens) was not interested. He said no offer was made for him not to testify in exchange for such a post.

"I TOLD HIM I didn't think I would be interested in it anyway," Stevens said.

He said he and Bergeron had compared notes later over the situation and Bergeron told him that he was interested in being on the Racing Commission.

Bergeron told The States-Item that a

number of persons had indicated to him that he could be chairman of the Racing Commission if he wanted it, but he would not say if Partin was one of them.

Bergeron, head of the Bergeron Contracting Co., was a witness against Partin in testimony relating to a shootout in the town of Plaquemine in 1968 between Teamsters and his employees.

BERGERON SAID he went to Edwards after his conversation with Partin and the candidate told him then that he had committed the Racing Commission post but suggested he might be considered for the Contractors' Licensing Board.

However, according to Bergeron, he said that he was not interested in the Contractor's Board but was interested in the racing commission because he raises horses.

"I understood I had the Racing Commission job," Bergeron said. "The only way I would believe it was if Edwards met with me and he informed me.

"I was told by more than one person that if Edwards became governor I

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would be chairman of the Racing Commission."

BERGERON SAID if he thought Partin could "get me chairman of the Racing Commission I would be knocking on his door."

He said also that he no longer wanted to be a witness in the federal government's efforts to try Partin on the charge involving the shootout.

He said he was tired of it and wished the government would leave him out of it if Partin is brought to trial again.

The Teamster official has been tried twice, with the first trial ending in a hung jury and the second with the judge overturning the conviction and dismissing misdemeanor counts.

JOHNSTON, who is considering running for the U.S. Senate against Sen.

Allen J. Ellender, said he was unaware of any effort by Partin to endorse him as had some Teamster unions around the state.

Partin was in Gov. Edwards' office Friday along with four other union officials.

Edwards said he was not aware that Partin was one of them. He said they discussed the administration's proposal to repeal the natural gas rebate to industry. He said the union officials wanted the meeting because they had been told their members' jobs might be in jeopardy if the rebate is repealed and they wanted to hear the administration's side.

Partin and the others were brought to the governor's office by Sen. Louis J. Lambert Jr. of Gonzales and were accompanied by Sheriff Hickley Waguespack of Ascension Parish, who is to be the director of public safety in the Edwards administration.

Lambert said he arranged the meeting for the union officials as he would for any constituents.