

Jim Brown politician, but no Edwards

Robert Wooley was clearly uncomfortable the first time I talked to him after he took over operation of the state's oversight of the insurance industry from his former boss Jim Brown.

At that time, Brown expected to be back in office soon and Wooley quite clearly expected him to be.

He insisted on using the term "Acting Commissioner of Insurance," and joked, "I'm not really an insurance commissioner, but I play one on television."

A few weeks later Brown dropped by The Town Talk, and he definitely was planning on regaining his office.

Brown talked about staying in touch with people who were having insurance problems and of the things he planned to do when he got back behind his old desk.

Now it looks like Brown will see at least a few months of prison time and that he won't be going back to his old desk.

Brown didn't even get his own headline.

The deaths of C.S. Lewis and Aldus Huxley were barely noticed, falling as they did on the same day President John F. Kennedy was shot.

So too, the rejection of Brown's appeal was diminished by the news that former Gov. Edwin Edwards also lost his appeal and was headed for federal prison.

While it's easy to simply lump Brown in with the other Louisiana insurance commissioners, agriculture commissioners and other public officials who have been convicted of criminal offenses, Brown's case is different.

He was acquitted of the criminal accusation that started his entanglement with the criminal justice system, but was found guilty of lying to an FBI agent.

Many observers have suggested that had Brown, when first approached by the FBI, simply said that he wouldn't talk to them without his lawyer present, he would likely still be in office.

That may be an oversimplification, but there is a ring of truth to it.

And then there is the Sun King himself, Edwards. He also seems ready to sample federal accommodations.



ROY PITCHFORD

A good friend from South Louisiana - who, by the way, was a law enforcement officer - died before having to pay me the several soft drinks he bet me that both Bill Clinton and Al Gore would be thrown out of office before completing their second terms.

He was willing to bet anyone that Edwards would never go to prison. And the bets he sought on that subject were cash, not soft drinks.

I never made such a bet with my friend. I didn't know if the government would ever get a conviction and make it stick.

Regrettably, sending public officials to prison is nothing new in Louisiana.

We have a law that state buildings cannot be named for living people. That law was passed when a governor was convicted of wrongdoing after his name had already been etched in marble on the facade of a university building.

And close on the heels of the denial of the appeals of Edwards and Brown came the indictment of Bob Odom, the man who was going to clean up the mess in the Agriculture Commissioner's office that Gil Dozier made.

Politicians aren't the only Louisiana heroes who fall. A friend at church recently spoke of having seen Billy Cannon, arguably the greatest LSU football player ever, throwing a Frisbee while a prisoner at a federal facility in Texarkana.

But politicians are different because they represent us to the rest of the country, and in many cases we voted for them.

It's one thing to vote out of office an elected official who violates public trust. It's another thing to see him arrested, tried and convicted.

There may be a few people who celebrate when Edwards finally goes through the locked gates, but most of us will merely be disappointed.

In the case of Brown it will truly be sad.

Make no mistake; Brown was a Louisiana politician in every sense of the word. But on his worst day he was no Edwin Edwards.

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