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EX-SENATOR ADMITS TO LYING TO FBI IN LOST TRUST PROBE

CLIF LeBLANC, Staff Writer

Former prosecutor and senator J.M. "Bud" Long, now an ailing 72-year-old, Wednesday admitted under oath he lied in 1990 to FBI agents investigating legislative corruption.

"I stand before this court and tell you that . . . the statement I made that I could not recall accepting cash from a lobbyist was untrue," Long, reading from a prepared statement, told federal Judge Charles Haden. "I made that oral representation knowing that it was untrue, when in fact I had accepted \$2,800 from Ron Cobb on May 22, 1990." Weakened by emphysema, Long held onto a lectern in court as he spoke. But his voice was clear and strong as he answered Haden's questions. At the end, Long said, "I plead guilty, your honor."

Under federal sentencing guidelines, Long faces up to six months in prison for the felony.

Federal prosecutors said they are willing to accept probation. A sentencing date has not been set, but generally it's two to three months after a plea.

"It's a fair resolution of the case," said Bart Daniel, who was the chief prosecutor when Long was initially charged.

The one-time senator and solicitor from Myrtle Beach was about to face a second trial on charges that he not only lied about taking money from Cobb, a former lobbyist-turned-informant, but that it was a bribe.

Federal prosecutors offered to drop the bribery charge in exchange for Long's plea to the lesser charge, said **Jack Swerling**, Long's lawyer since the first trial in 1991.

"It was an offer we couldn't refuse," **Swerling** said. "I think he is relieved that this count (bribery) of the Hobbs Act accusation is off him."

The Hobbs Act is a federal law that bars public officials from accepting anything of value in exchange for an official act.

Long, accompanied by his wife and four of his seven children, took no questions from reporters.

In his first trial, the jury found Long guilty of bribery for taking the cash in exchange for pushing a parimutuel betting bill. The legislation became the government's front for the corruption and

drugs sting known as Operation Lost Trust. Long was the last legislator tried in the case that ensnared 28 lawmakers, lobbyists and others. One legislator, Rep. Tim Wilkes, D-Fairfield, was acquitted.

The trial judge at the time, Falcon Hawkins, threw out the jury's verdict against Long. Hawkins said some of the evidence in the trial should not have been allowed.

Hawkins let jurors hear the evidence only because federal prosecutors at the time said it was integral to their conspiracy charge against Long.

After hearing the case, Hawkins said the evidence of conspiracy was flimsy. He refused to let the jury consider that charge.

But jurors had already heard some bribery evidence as part of the conspiracy case. Hawkins decided it tainted the bribery case and granted Long a new trial.

During bitter appeals fights, Hawkins threw out the indictments against Long and four other ex-legislators to punish prosecutors Hawkins ruled were guilty of misconduct.

An appeals court overturned Hawkins and ordered retrials.

One-time Lexington Rep. Paul Derrick was found guilty of bribery in late May.

In June, a jury could not reach a verdict on former Sumter Rep. Larry Blanding. Blanding will be tried a third time the week of Aug. 16.

'The statement I made that I could not recall accepting cash from a lobbyist was untrue.' J.M. 'BUD' LONG



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EX-SEN. LONG TO PLEAD TO LESSER OFFENSE

CLIF LeBLANC, Staff Writer

The federal government will drop its bribery charge against former Horry County Sen. J.M. "Bud" Long next week in exchange for a plea to a lesser offense.

Long, the last legislator tried in the FBI's Operation Lost Trust vote-buying sting in the early 1990s, is expected to plead Wednesday to making a false statement to an FBI agent, said **Jack Swerling**, Long's attorney. Reached late Friday afternoon, **Swerling** said the plea bargain was reached this week.

Long will admit that he lied when he told an agent that he had not gotten cash from then-lobbyist Ron Cobb or known anyone who had.

Long said he considered the \$2,800 a campaign contribution. Prosecutors called it a bribe. They also charged Long with conspiracy to extort a bribe.

A jury found him guilty of taking the cash in exchange for pushing a gambling bill. Investigators used a pari-mutuel betting bill as a front for their corruption investigation.

Judge Falcon Hawkins threw out the bribery verdict. He ruled that the evidence used to convict Long should not have been allowed.

Hawkins let the jury hear the evidence only because federal prosecutors said it was integral to their conspiracy charge. After hearing the case, Hawkins didn't agree. He blocked the conspiracy charge from going to the jury, saying the evidence was too flimsy.

But jurors already had heard some of the evidence, and Hawkins decided it tainted Long's trial. He granted a new one.

Long had been scheduled to be retried next week, but a hospital stay had delayed the trial into July if the plea bargaining failed, **Swerling** said.



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