

## **Ex-aide for Gibbons gets prison term**

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

April 19, 1997, Saturday, 2 Late Tampa Edition

Copyright 1997 Times Publishing Company

**Section:** TAMPA & STATE; Pg. 1B

**Length:** 473 words

**Byline:** LARRY DOUGHERTY

**Dateline:** TAMPA

### **Body**

---

A former aide to retired U.S. Rep. Sam Gibbons was sentenced Friday to 18 months in federal prison for swindling foreigners who hoped to emigrate to this country.

Edna Taylor, 48, had earlier pleaded guilty to forging letters on behalf of immigrants for money, and taking \$ 400,000 from about 1,000 immigrants who had little or no chance of obtaining permanent residency.

Taylor told them that merely becoming a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church would make them eligible to stay in this country. Neither Gibbons nor anyone else in his office was involved, investigators said.

SCAM

Although some Seventh-day ministers went to court Friday to vouch for Taylor, a former church clerk, it was clear they did little to ease the anger of the judge.

Taylor took from "poor people, from poverty-stricken people" whose identities were unknown and who could never get their money back, said U.S. District Judge Elizabeth Kovachevich.

"But on your conscience should be indelibly impressed the faces of those people even if you don't know their names," Kovachevich told Taylor. "You've got a lot of time to think about your greed. I hope you could do something for them, maybe pray for them."

Taylor staggered away from the bench weeping, a handkerchief in hand, repeating, "How could she do that, how could she do that." It seemed she might collapse, and several ministers rushed to support her.

Outside the courthouse those who had spoken for Taylor were somber.

"I feel upset because I don't feel justice was done," said Jonathan McCottry Sr., former pastor of the Town 'N Country Seventh-day congregation, for which Taylor had been the clerk.

McCottry admitted to the judge that Taylor had forged her name onto church letterhead, promising church jobs that didn't exist. Having a church job at the time was grounds for resident status.

Nevertheless, McCottry told the judge he would be better off if he had "a thousand of her in my church."

According to the plea agreement Taylor signed last fall, she sent a letter to the Immigration and Naturalization Service on Gibbons' stationery in 1991 in support of Job Fleurimond, a minister that the Southeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Churches wanted to send to two congregations in Miami. Fleurimond obtained permanent residency later that year, and Taylor got \$ 500 from the Southeastern Conference.

## Ex-aide for Gibbons gets prison term

Taylor accepted another \$ 500 for assisting another minister, Gedeon Pierre Fontil, in obtaining residency.

With the endorsement of the Southeastern Conference, Taylor traveled the state, promising to help church members with their INS applications. She told them their membership in the church qualified them for residency. She accepted money from them knowing that few, if any, were eligible.

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (90%); JUDGES (89%); GUILTY PLEAS (89%); RELIGION (89%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); SENTENCING (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); CORRECTIONS (78%); DECISIONS & RULINGS (78%); PLEA AGREEMENTS (78%); **PRISONS** (78%); LITIGATION (78%); JAIL SENTENCING (78%); EMIGRATION (78%); POOR POPULATION (77%); PROTESTANTS & PROTESTANTISM (76%); CLERGY & RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS (76%); LAW COURTS & TRIBUNALS (74%); LETTERS & COMMENTS (72%); POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS (68%); AGREEMENTS (65%)

**Company:** SOUTHEASTERN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE (67%)

**Organization:** SOUTHEASTERN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE (67%)

**Geographic:** SOUTHEAST USA (91%); UNITED STATES (79%)

**Load-Date:** April 21, 1997