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## Departing Gov. Fletcher pardons 83

He also reduces 3 felons' sentences

By **Stephenie Steitzer** and **Tom Loftus**  
The Courier-Journal

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- On his final day in office, Gov. Ernie Fletcher issued 83 pardons yesterday -- far more than any Kentucky governor in recent history -- and reduced the prison sentences of three felons through commutations.

One of the pardons went to Morgan County Judge-Executive Timothy Conley, like Fletcher a Republican.



The pardons Ernie Fletcher issued far surpassed the number granted by other recent governors.

Fletcher's general counsel, David Fleenor, said Conley has not been convicted of a crime but is being investigated for alleged improper conduct.

One of the commutations reduced to life in prison the death sentence given to a Louisville man convicted of murder, and another cut to eight years the 20-year sentence for the son of

a state representative.

The third freed a Hopkinsville man sentenced to 20 years in prison on murder charges in a traffic accident that killed two.

"The ultimate purpose of the pardon power is to grant mercy and ensure justice in exceptional circumstances," Fletcher said in a statement. "It is also an integral part of the rule of law and the doctrine of separation of powers."

A pardon completely forgives or erases an offense, while a commutation reduces a sentence.

Fletcher's pardons far surpass the number issued by other governors in the past 30 years. Since Gov. Wendell Ford left office in 1974, the most issued was 24, by Gov. Wallace Wilkinson.

Fleenor said last night that "typically a governor would do 20. We've gone 12 years without doing any."

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He was referring to the fact that Gov. Paul Patton, Fletcher's predecessor, issued no pardons after his eight years in office.

But during his tenure Patton pardoned his chief of staff, Andrew "Skipper" Martin, and three others charged with campaign-finance crimes stemming from his 1995 election.

And in 2005 Fletcher issued a pardon for those other than himself charged in connection with the merit-system investigation of his administration.

The three commutations that Fletcher issued yesterday will result in the release of only one of the inmates: Demond Brown, an African American who was convicted in the fatal Hopkinsville traffic accident.

Brown was convicted by an all-white jury in the deaths of a white woman and her daughter, drawing protests from members of the black community.

In June 2005 the state Supreme Court upheld Brown's 2002 conviction, marking the first time the high court had sustained a wanton-murder conviction of a driver who ran a red light but was not drinking, on drugs or speeding excessively.

Jim Carter, the Hopkinsville attorney who has represented Brown, was floored last night when a Courier-Journal reporter called him to tell him that his client had been pardoned.

"Bingo! That is wonderful!" Carter exclaimed. "I was hoping (Fletcher) would do it, but I had about given up."

Carter said he had talked with associates in Frankfort about the case in hopes that they would talk with the governor, but he had not made a formal request to Fletcher.

"This is correcting a terrible wrong," he said.

Fletcher reduced to life without parole the death sentence given Jeffrey Devan Leonard, also known as James Earl Slaughter, who was convicted of fatally stabbing Louisville store clerk Esther Stewart in 1983.

Leonard's case has been controversial in part because his trial lawyer, Louisville attorney Fred Radolovich, was disbarred and indicted on a perjury charge for claiming he had handled four death-penalty cases before Leonard's.

In fact, he had no experience as a lead attorney in a capital case and surrendered his law license earlier this year in a deal with prosecutors that ended the perjury case.

Ernie Lewis, executive director of the Department of Public Advocacy, said in a statement last night that Leonard "was a young, poor, brain-damaged African-American man with no criminal history and about whom the jury was told nothing when they decided that he should die."

Leonard had exhausted his appeals and was in line to have an execution date set.

With his third commutation, Fletcher reduced from 20 years to eight the sentence of Burgiss Harrison Yonts, who was convicted of murder earlier this year in the death of a Murray State University graduate student struck by a car while walking on the side of a road.

Yonts is the son of state Rep. Brent Yonts, D-Greenville.

"I'm very proud the governor did what he did," Brent Yonts said last night. "I'd hoped for a pardon, but I understand the various factors the governor must balance in these decisions."

Perhaps the most notable pardon was that of Conley, the Morgan County judge-executive. He was indicted by a grand jury earlier this year for alleged abuse of the public trust, but a judge dismissed the charges.

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Fleenor said Fletcher pardoned Conley because officials in Morgan County have said they are still considering bringing charges against him.

Conley could not be reached for comment last night.


Other pardons were issued for former Monroe County Judge-Executive Mitchell Page and former County Clerk Larry Pitcock, who were sentenced to 18 months in prison in 1996 for failing to pay property taxes on vehicles.


A jury concluded that Page and Pitcock, both Republicans, schemed to avoid paying property taxes on six vehicles, including five owned by Page, Pitcock or their relatives. The taxes and penalties and interest amounted to \$1,733.84.

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Reporter Stephenie Steitzer can be reached at (502) 875-5136.

Reporter Charlie White and The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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What irony. A criminal with the power to pardon others. Ernie, you slimey bag of poop, good riddance. 😂😂 Count your blessings you're not serving time, you thug.

To the new guv: Let this be a lesson to you. You work for us. We are the bosses. Don't mess around with things that don't concern you. Keep your pants up, your paws out of the money jar, and you will have avoided the problems of the last 2 clowns in office.

Ernie, don't go too far. When we finally get that new bridge built, you can be the first jumper. Happy holidays EX governor! muwhahahahahahaha!!!! 😂😂

Posted: Tue Dec 11, 2007 9:15 am

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Not every REP has a moral compass, this is a good example of one. He would make a great demo

Posted: Tue Dec 11, 2007 9:06 am

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C'mon, GOPers...let's hear you whine about how Democrats are "soft on crime".

Posted: Tue Dec 11, 2007 8:46 am

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What a slime-ball. Get the hell out of my state.

Posted: Tue Dec 11, 2007 7:51 am

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One BIG criminal pardoning others. Why should we be surprised?

Posted: Tue Dec 11, 2007 7:33 am

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