

Mississippi sheriff arrested on a dozen felony charges

Associated Press A northern Mississippi sheriff was arrested Wednesday, December 19, on a dozen felony charges involving guns, drugs, sex with inmates and threatening sheriff's department employees if they told anyone about the crimes.

Webster County Sheriff Timothy Seth Mitchell was arrested Wednesday morning at his home in Eupora, said District Attorney Doug Evans, and jailed in Lafayette County awaiting a Thursday court appearance in Eupora. Evans said he knew of no attorney representing the 53-year-old. The second-term sheriff

is charged with two counts each of embezzlement, trafficking in stolen firearms and furnishing an inmate with weapons, a cellphone and narcotics. Mitchell is also charged with one count each of attempting sex with an inmate; tampering with evidence and permitting possession or sale of a controlled substance in jail; and three counts of retaliation against a witness.

A sworn statement from Mississippi Bureau of Investigation agent Mark Steed accuses Mitchell of multiple crimes beginning in November 2017, when he's accused of illegally buying pills from an infor-

mant.

Beginning this spring, Mitchell is accused of seeking sex with two women in his jail. He's also accused of ordering a deputy to remove four guns from his department's evidence locker and selling or giving at least some to a department employee and an inmate. Mitchell also provided that same inmate with illegal drugs and a cellphone, Steed says, while ordering the deputy to remove illegal drugs from evidence.

Mitchell threatened then-Chief Deputy Jeffrey Mann and two other employees if they told anyone, the charges say. Mann, cited as one of nine witnesses in the case, resigned Oct. 31, writing a letter to county supervisors accusing Mitchell of crimes.

"After witnessing the illegal activities Sheriff Tim Mitchell has taken part (in), I cannot be part of this organization," wrote Mann, who had already announced he was running for sheriff next year.

Mitchell had publicly announced he was going to resign, claiming health problems. He wavered on that announcement before reaffirming it in recent weeks.

After Mitchell was arrested Wednesday, dozens of law enforcement officers swooped down on the Webster County sheriff's office and jail. WTVA-TV reported county jail inmates were

led out to state Highway Patrol cars where they were questioned. In the meantime, agents of state Auditor Shad White inventoried sheriff's department equipment and evidence.

Mitchell left chief deputy Andy McCants in charge, Evans said. If Mitchell resigns or is removed, supervisors would appoint a new sheriff.

Evans said the charges would be presented to a grand jury, but said he wasn't sure when. The next regularly scheduled grand jury in Webster County meets in January. Conviction on all charges would carry a maximum penalty of 152 years in prison and fines of up to \$102,000, officials said in a news release.

Evans said charges against others are possible. "I have had cases where officers have been charged, but I have never had a case quite like this," Evans said.

Mitchell is the second Mississippi sheriff arrested this year.

William Brewer resigned as sheriff in northern Mississippi's Tallahatchie County in August, days after he was arrested on federal charges related to narcotics trafficking and extortion.

Federal authorities said that for 15 years Brewer protected a drug dealer who robbed other dealers and kicked back stolen money and drug profits to Brewer.

Brewer pleaded guilty Nov. 1 to one count of attempting to extort a bribe relating to \$6,500 in cash that Brewer received earlier this year. He's scheduled for sentencing in February.

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