



Judge gives wealthy Palm Beach woman a few seconds of probation in tax case

By Mike Clary, Sun Sentinel

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WEST PALM BEACH—

A 79-year-old Palm Beach woman who previously pleaded guilty to two charges of evading taxes on \$43 million dodged a maximum six-year prison sentence Thursday when a federal judge sentenced her only to probation.

But even Mary Estelle Curran's probation didn't last long: Senior U.S. District Judge Kenneth Ryskamp ended the probation seconds after he imposed it — telling government lawyers that he thought Curran's prosecution had been unnecessary.

Ryskamp then suggested to Curran's lawyer, prominent defense attorney Roy Black, that he seek a presidential pardon on behalf of his client.

Black said he had never heard a judge do that before.

"She was on probation for about five seconds," Black said. "She had never handled anything like this before, didn't know about the forms you had to fill out, and I think the judge thought it unfair to prosecute her."

Curran, known in Palm Beach for charity work, inherited wealth from her husband, Mortimer Curran, a money manager. He died in November 2000.

The IRS launched an investigation into Curran's financial holdings in 2009, a year after she learned that she should have been paying taxes on accounts in Switzerland and Liechtenstein, Black said.

But her disclosures were tardy, and Curran found herself caught up in an IRS sting aimed at Americans evading taxes on funds kept abroad.

"Thus by the time the attorney got around to filing Mrs. Curran's voluntary disclosure, Mrs. Curran had already come under investigation by the (U.S. Department of Justice)

and consequently, she was no longer eligible for the voluntary disclosure program, as she had been when she retained the lawyer," Black wrote in a court filing.

Earlier this year, Curran agreed to pay a penalty of \$21.6 million to the IRS in hopes of ending the case.

In advance of her sentencing, Black submitted to the court several letters of support from those who attested to Curran's community work with disabled children and the blind.

Among those writing in support was Mortimer Curran Jr. He described his mother as a frugal woman who continued to reflect the values of her upbringing on a Canadian farm "in the middle of nowhere."

"Despite her means, my mother has always lived a quiet life with very few trappings," he wrote to the judge.

She still drives a 2006 Toyota Corolla with manual windows, he said, and has never updated her kitchen, which still has green and white Formica countertops installed 30 years ago.

Mortimer Curran also told the court his mother had been "vilified in the press, expelled from some of her cherished charities, and in many ways ostracized by her community."

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