Goes Around, Comes Around

Karma sinks governor deaf to AIDS convict's plea

March 1, 1997 By Walter Armstrong and Ronnilyn Pustil

Arthur Hurst, a petty thief and drug-user, stood before Arizona's Board of Executive Clemency last fall, begging for his life. He'd already served two years of a five-year sentence for trafficking in stolen property. (He lifted jewelry, videos and other valuables from friends, then pawned for the good for drug money.) Now, as reported in *The Arizona Republic*, he wants clemency-prison docs say he has late-stage AIDS.

Part of Hurst's statement to the clemency board read: "I accept full responsibility for my crime. I am dying of AIDS. Facing this fact has caused me to examine almost everything about my life and the way I have conducted it. I am asking for the opportunity to die at home with my family-with dignity, and after having had an opportunity to exhaust all possible medical remedies for a cure. I cannot do this while in prison."

Hurst told the clemency board that he's attended all the self-help programs available in Arizona prisons, and that he's had no positive drug tests since entering the system. He pointed out that he has never committed a violent crime, that his wife and daughter are waiting for him and he has a stable home in which to live if released. He expressed remorse for his crimes and his determination to stay drug free.

The board's vote was unanimous: 7-0 in favor of clemency. But when Gov. J. Fife Symington III received the recommendation from his own handpicked board, he responded with one word: Denied. "My husband was devastated," said Christina Hurst, who married Arthur in prison last February. "His first response was, 'They sentenced me again.' And they did. Three more years is a life sentence for him." After Hurst's sentence commutation was nixed, Christina filed a second time, citing eminent danger of death. But the head of the clemency board denied Hurst another hearing-its members don't want to go up against the governor again.

Symington has ignored Christina's phone calls and letters. That may be because the governor has a lot on his mind these days. He stands indicted by a federal grand jury on 23 criminal counts, most of which carry more jail time than petty thievery. Plus, he recently filed for bankruptcy in an attempt to evade payback of millions of dollars in personal loans.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.