

Andrew Thomas, Phoenix Prosecutor, Disbarred For 'Defiled' Public Trust

A former top Arizona prosecutor and anti-illegal immigration crusader used his office to destroy political enemies, filed malicious and unfounded criminal charges and committed perjury and other crimes, a state legal ethics panel ruled on Tuesday in Phoenix.

The three-member panel voted unanimously to disbar Andrew Thomas, the former Maricopa County attorney, and his former top deputy, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~. Thomas was elected in 2004 and resigned in 2010 during his second term to pursue an unsuccessful run for Arizona attorney general.

"This is the story of the public trust dishonored, desecrated and defiled," the ethics panel said.

As chief prosecutor for Arizona's most populous county, which covers much of the Phoenix area, Thomas, a Republican, gained national prominence after joining forces with Joe Arpaio, Maricopa County's controversial sheriff, in aggressively pursuing, detaining and prosecuting undocumented immigrants.

A series of failed public corruption prosecutions, also closely plotted with Arpaio, proved Thomas's downfall. After the cases collapsed, a far-reaching independent investigation authorized by the Arizona Supreme Court revealed stunning ethical lapses, according to the scathing 247-page report by the review panel.

Thomas suffered from "profound arrogance" that led him into "ethical ruin," said the panel, headed by William O'Neill, the state's presiding disciplinary judge.

Thomas, aided by ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~, "outrageously exploited power, flagrantly fostered fear, and disgracefully misused the law," the panel said.

In a decision read from the bench, O'Neill said the panel found "clear and convincing evidence" that Thomas and his deputy brought unfounded and malicious criminal and civil charges against political opponents, including four state judges and the state attorney general.

The charges were ultimately rejected by state grand juries or thrown out of court as meritless, but not before wrecking havoc on the lives of those targeted.

Thomas used his office to settle political scores and worked closely with Arpaio's office in the discredited prosecutions, said Bennett Gershman, a national expert on prosecutor misconduct who acted as a consultant for the ethics investigation.

"Anybody who disagreed with them, they indicted," Gershman said.

In one instance, Thomas brought criminal charges against a state judge with no evidence and no investigation, in order to stop the judge from filing an adverse ruling the following day in a corruption case. In another case, Thomas indicted a county official on more than 120 misdemeanor and felony counts, despite having clear