

earlier.

Thomas and Arpaio are under investigation by a federal grand jury for possible civil rights and other charges, according to court documents obtained by the *Arizona Republic* in 2010. A spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's office in Phoenix declined to comment on the grand jury proceedings.

Despite the harsh sanctions, Thomas remained defiant on Tuesday, declaring in a statement that his disbarment was the result of a "political witch hunt."

"Today, corruption has won and justice has lost," Thomas said. "I brought corruption cases in good faith involving powerful people, and the political and legal establishment blatantly covered up and retaliated by targeting my law license."

Thomas' claims of persecution rang false to Rick Romley, a fellow Republican who served as Maricopa County attorney for 16 years prior to Thomas's election to the office in 2004.

"There is no credibility in that statement," Romley said in an interview with The Huffington Post. "It really begs the question of whether or not he is delusional."

Romley, who led several major corruption probes during his tenure, applauded the ethics panel's ruling.

"It's absolutely clear that this wasn't a search for justice," he said of Thomas's contested prosecutions. "This is an issue of vindictiveness and a clear abuse of power."

Arpaio issued a statement on the disciplinary panel's decision, but did not leap to his former ally's defense.

"Today's decision no doubt is a disappointment to Andrew Thomas, his family and his colleagues," said Arpaio, dubbed "America's Toughest Sheriff" by conservatives. "He was a hard-working professional who served the people of this county for many years."

"As there are several lawsuits involving some of the same parties and issues involved in today's decision, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further," Arpaio said.