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Plea deal does not resolve acrimony in case of former Lake County coroner

By JIM NEWTON
NEWS-SUN | MAR 18, 2018



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Negotiated plea deals resolve significantly more felony cases than trials, and usually with less acrimony following the proceedings because both sides receive some benefits through the agreements.

But in the controversial case of Thomas Rudd, the ex-Lake County coroner whose election-related felony perjury charges were dismissed Wednesday after he pleaded guilty to misdemeanor charges of disregarding the election code, resentment remained fairly strong among parties on both sides.

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Prosecutor Bernard Murray with the Illinois Appellate Prosecutor's Office had little to say immediately after the deal was approved in Lake County Circuit Court, but after seeing comments and press release excerpts given by Rudd and defense attorney Jed Stone to the media, Murray said he felt the need to respond.

Rudd had said he was glad the case was over, but "saddened" by the amount of time and money spent by the state to prosecute what he called a clerical error.

Murray said the requirements for the petitions are clearly spelled out on each page and are not difficult to understand or "legalese."

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The charges against Rudd stated that he signed several election petition pages for the 2016 primary without having collected the signatures himself.

Rudd did not deny the allegations, but maintained throughout the case it was a "mistake" and an oversight, and noted he withdrew his petitions after complaints were filed by opponents and before he was charged.

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But Murray said aspects of the case do not support Rudd's claims that the petition errors were a mistake. If the case had gone to trial, one of the witnesses would have testified that he collected several of Rudd's nominating signature pages and was asked afterword "not to sign them," Murray said.

Murray said the state had 44 affidavits from people who stated Rudd was not the person who collected the signatures on several pages Rudd signed and had notarized.

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statement that he felt the shooting death of Fox Lake police Lt. Charles Joseph Gliniewicz was a suicide while investigators were still referring to the case as a likely homicide.

It was later concluded by authorities that Gliniewicz did kill himself, after attempting to creating a crime scene that would appear as if he were shot by someone else.

Rudd also clashed with the Lake County State's Attorney's Office over the case of former daycare worker Melissa Calusinski, whose conviction of the murder of a boy in her care drew controversy and appeals, with Rudd stating he believes medical records showed the boy likely died as the result of an existing condition.

Murray said that from his review of the evidence and discovery in the case against Rudd, the investigation and charges against the former coroner were initiated by several complaints about his nominating papers by both Republican and Democratic individuals.

"To say that this was some sort of vendetta by law enforcement is ridiculous," Murray said.

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Both the State's Attorney's Office and the Lake County Sheriff's Office have adamantly denied that politics or disagreements played any role in the investigation into Rudd's election violations or the decision to charge him with perjury.

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Because Rudd was a county official when the alleged perjury occurred, State's Attorney Michael Nerheim requested that the Illinois Appellate Prosecutor's Office prosecute the case to avoid any potential conflicts.

In response to Murray's comments, Stone repeated his assertion that, "Thomas Rudd is a an honest, true American hero, and I don't care what Mr. Murray has to say."

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In exchange for Rudd's guilty plea to disregarding the election code, five felony counts of perjury against him were dismissed. The negotiated agreement also states that Rudd must serve two years of conditional discharge, a less stringent form of probation that doesn't require regular reporting to a probation officer.

The plea deal also includes a stipulation that Rudd cannot be employed by any form of government or run for public office for a period of five years after his conditional discharge period ends. He is on the primary ballot, and will remain so, as a precinct committeeman candidate. The state said Rudd would be allowed to remain in the running for that because it is a political party post, not an official office.

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Hometown - Evanston, IL. Currently, Gurnee Illinois. I received an English/journalism degree from Miami University, Oxford Ohio, in 1984. First journalism job as staff writer with the weekly Independent-Register, Libertyville, in 1984. In 1985, I was hired by The News-Sun, where I am presently primarily covering Lake County felony courts.

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