

## **Former D.A. becomes part of scourge he tried to end**

Wednesday, Mar 16, 2005

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### **PAMPA (AP) - Rick Roach got elected district attorney in West Texas on a vow to rid the streets of drug dealers and users, and he went after them mercilessly.**

"Drugs, drug usage, drug trafficking has become a scourge in our society," Roach thundered during closing arguments at a drug trial that sent a 30-year-old man to prison for 60 years in 2001.

Few guessed, until recently at least, the hypocrisy behind it all: Roach himself did drugs.

Roach, 55, was arrested inside a courtroom Jan. 11 and charged with possessing methamphetamine and cocaine. In February, he took a plea bargain on one charge - possession of a gun by a drug addict. He could get up to 10 years in prison when he is sentenced in mid-April.

Roach told The New York Times that he had suffered from depression from age 13, and that he used illegal drugs to medicate himself.

"I just sort of, you might say, went nuts: I made irrational and wrong decisions," he told the newspaper. "There's no excuse. I've gotten what I deserve."

Now under house arrest at his mother's home until sentencing, he declined to comment to the Associated Press. An electronic monitoring device prohibits him from venturing more than 200 feet from the house.

The tough-on-drugs D.A. won re-election in November in his five-county Texas Panhandle district and was just days into his second term when he was arrested.

John Mann, the district attorney who lost to Roach in 2000, said he noticed a difference in the man about 18 months before Roach stepped down in February. Roach had "kind of backed off" drug prosecutions, Mann said.

"I think it was probably his inability to be coherent," Mann said. "I saw him acting like a fool for a year and half."

Roach became prone to extreme mood swings and was sometimes incoherent and paranoid, according to court documents. He also had lost 30 pounds and his skin was sallow.

Shortly before his arrest, a worker in his office in Pampa found a syringe containing meth residue floating in a toilet. And according to court records, Roach shot up drugs in front of an employee in his office.

"Who in their right mind would inject themselves in front of an employee?" Roach told the Times.

He also had trouble sitting still and had unexplained absences from work. In December, he appeared "wired" during a court hearing, fumbling through papers and repeating what defense lawyers said until a judge told him to be quiet, Mann said.

That same month, outside a different courtroom, Roach was jumpy and could not carry on a coherent conversation, prompting courthouse employees to speculate that he was "on something," said Leslie Breeding, the Roberts County attorney.

"There have been rumors for years, but this time it was so pronounced and so obvious it really couldn't be ignored," Breeding said.

Roach was arrested after federal agents said they were tipped off by people in law enforcement.

David Holmes, a prosecutor under Roach between 2001 and 2003, said Roach at times was friendly and talked about his Christianity; he even sang a few times in a gospel band. More often, Roach was demeaning, controlling and paranoid, he said.

Roach started locking the main door at his courthouse office, requiring any visitor to knock before seeing the receptionist. Every Friday afternoon, he sent his staff home and stayed alone in the office, where he kept several loaded guns.

Roach rarely tried drug cases himself, but made those prosecutions his priority. He kept tight reins on his assistants to ensure they went for as much time as they could, Holmes said.

One time, Roach accused Holmes of not being aggressive enough after Holmes offered a man probation in a drug case, Holmes said. Holmes said he told Roach the man probably would violate his probation soon, and that was what happened. The man's probation was revoked and he was sent to prison for 15 years, Holmes said.

Roach's drug problems did not begin in the Panhandle, according to former acquaintances. In the late 1980s, when he was a lawyer in Breckenridge, about 90 miles west of Fort Worth, he told people he had gotten addicted to speed and was going to a drug rehab center, Breckenridge attorney Jimmy Browning said.

As he awaits sentencing, Roach told the Times he knows prison time anywhere will be tough on him.

"Prosecutors don't do well in the pen," he said.

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Associated Press writer Angela Brown in Fort Worth and Pampa News Editor Dee Dee Laramore contributed to this report.