

Friday, January 28, 2005

Cache of drugs, guns found in search of DA's residences, office

By BETSY BLANEY

Associated Press

When West Texas District Attorney Rick Roach was arrested at the Gray County courthouse on methamphetamine charges, federal agents found two handguns in his brief case.

A search of his courthouse office, home and an apartment, all in Pampa, turned up 35 more guns, along with what appeared to be a stash of cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana, according to search warrant inventory lists obtained by The Associated Press. The weapons included shotguns, revolvers and semi-automatic pistols and rifles.

Federal prosecutor Christy Drake wouldn't discuss whether Roach owned the guns legally, whether they were evidence from criminal cases Roach's office handled, or why Roach had so many guns.

West Texas District Attorney Rick Roach leaves the Federal Courthouse Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2004, after his hearing in Amarillo, Texas. Roach, 55, was arrested Jan. 11 at the Gray County Courthouse before he was scheduled to present cases. A search of his courthouse office, home and an apartment, all in Pampa, turned up 35 more guns, along with what appeared to be a stash of cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana, according to search warrant inventory lists obtained by The Associated Press. The weapons included shotguns, revolvers and semi-automatic pistols and rifles.

"The origin of those guns I can't really comment on, other than to say they traveled in interstate commerce," Drake said.

Roach, who was elected in 2000 after running on a tough-on-drugs campaign, is accused of possessing methamphetamines, possession of one ounce each of methamphetamine and cocaine with intent to distribute, and unlawful possession of weapons by a drug addict. If convicted on all counts, he faces up to 51 years in prison and \$2.5 million in fines.

Roach, 55, was arrested Jan. 11 after federal agents said they received tips from witnesses who "are all in the law enforcement community and are reliable" that Roach was allegedly involved in criminal activity.

A federal magistrate ordered Roach to an inpatient drug rehabilitation center while awaiting trial. He has pleaded innocent to the charges.

Roach's attorney, Bill Kelly, said he hadn't talked to his client about the weapons, but he believed Roach either had legal rights to them as a prosecutor or legally owned them.

"A lot of people collect guns, and they're certainly not illegal in doing so," he said. "This is hunters' country."

But David Holmes, an assistant prosecutor under Roach between 2001 and 2003, said he was surprised to hear so many guns were found at Roach's home. "I never knew him to be an avid hunter," Holmes said.

The day Roach was arrested, FBI agents searched his office, home and an apartment rented by the DA's office where Roach sometimes stayed.

At the office, agents said they found 20 handguns, a rifle and a shotgun; a syringe; two digital scales and a zippered pouch containing suspected cocaine, methamphetamines and marijuana. The pouch was found in an office restroom used by Roach and other employees.

At Roach's home, agents found 13 guns, mainly rifles and shotguns, court documents show. No drugs were reported found.

No weapons were found at the apartment but some ammunition was recovered, court documents show.

On Jan. 3, Roach told someone that he first tried methamphetamine several months earlier after it was found in a seized vehicle, and "was now a regular user," court documents show.

In recent months, Roach exhibited extreme mood swings and paranoia, behaved irrationally, and made incoherent statements, according to court documents. He was also unable to sit still and had unexplained absences from work.

Some residents in the counties Roach represents — Gray, Roberts, Hemphill, Lipscomb and Wheeler — had also noticed changes in the past few months but few suspected drug use, even though he had dropped about 30 pounds and his skin had become sallow.

In August, Roach brought a court order to a Department of Public Safety lab in Amarillo to check out two pounds of methamphetamine, saying he wanted it for training drug dogs, court documents show. As of Jan. 4, the DPS lab reported Roach had not returned the drugs.

Roach was just days into his second four-year term when he was arrested. He has been a licensed attorney for 25 years, and was Roberts County attorney for 10 years before getting elected district attorney.

Gray County Attorney Joshua Seabourn filed a petition to remove Roach from office. He said this week the petition would become moot if Roach resigns. He said he and Kelly have been negotiating terms for Roach's resignation. He said he would move forward with his petition, if he and the attorney can't reach an agreement.

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