

Paladino shows up to support Rus Thompson at felony voting arraignment

Paladino, McMurray protest prosecution of Thompson

By [Melinda Miller](#) | News Staff Reporter | on June 16, 2016 - 7:08 PM, updated June 17, 2016 at 7:11 AM

Political activist John “Rus” Thompson pleaded not guilty at his arraignment on voting fraud charges Thursday afternoon without the full retinue of supporters who attended his earlier court appearance.

Thompson’s wife, Jul Thompson, was in State Supreme Court for the proceedings, joined by Carl Paladino, former Republican gubernatorial candidate and current Buffalo School Board member.

Also there for Thompson was Grand Island Supervisor Nate McMurray, a lawyer and Democrat who took office in January.

“Jail time? Years of jail? We’re not talking about stuffing ballot boxes,” McMurray said. “Maybe bad judgment.”

Paladino criticized acting District Attorney Michael J. Flaherty Jr., a Democrat, for pursuing what he called a politically motivated prosecution that could leave Thompson a convicted felon for casting his ballot on Grand Island after he moved to Niagara Falls.

Paladino was particularly outraged over the fact that three assistant district attorneys were in court to handle the arraignment of a nonviolent felon who is free on his own recognizance.

Thompson was charged with one count of filing a false instrument and three counts of voting more than once using that instrument (his voter registration).

McMurray was less concerned with the number of prosecutors than he was with the length of time Thompson could spend in jail for what McMurray described as a minor offense in the wide range of voting crimes.

Thompson allegedly voted on Grand Island in the 2015 primary and general elections after he moved out of town. His wife said Thursday that they were evicted from their Grand Island home and were planning to return to the town as soon as they found a new place, so they didn’t change their voting status.

The Class E felonies carry a possible penalty of up to four years in prison, although probation also could be an option.

McMurray said he hoped Thompson, who aligns with Tea Party Republicans, is not being singled out for punishment because of his political views.

“When someone loses their freedom it should be for a very good reason,” McMurray said. “I don’t think this (offense) deserves this kind of response. A slap on the wrist maybe. ... I’m really troubled by this.”

Thompson, who appeared with his attorney Thomas Eoannou, declined to speak after his arraignment. He is expected back in court in about 45 days.