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Former GOP official sentenced to prison for tax crimes

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A federal judge sentenced a once powerful New Jersey Republican powerbroker to prison Wednesday for federal tax crimes.

George Gilmore, 70, of Toms River, faces a year and a day in prison. A jury previously convicted the former Ocean County Republican Party chairman of three charges, including failing to file payroll taxes for employees and making a false statement on a loan application.

U.S. District Judge Anne Thompson also mandated that he receive mental health treatment for his lavish spending and three years of probation.

His defense team has already made a motion to appeal.

When the judge issued the sentence, several of the roughly 30 people in the courtroom began to weep.

In court, Gilmore quietly apologized to officials, friends and family.

“I’m deeply sorry,” he said.

Gilmore faced three other charges, but he was found “not guilty” on two counts of filing a false tax return, and the jury couldn’t decide whether Gilmore was guilty of tax evasion. (That last charge was dropped Wednesday.)

The sentencing hearing partially centered on Gilmore’s state of mind when he spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on elephant tusks, pinball machines and other luxury items while burning through multiple credit cards.

Kevin Marino, Gilmore’s main lawyer, argued that Gilmore did not deserve any jail time.

“He’s a good man who suffers from a serious problem,” Marino said. Gilmore was generous with friends and family, and he mainly needed therapy for a shopping addiction, his lawyer argued.

A court-ordered psychological evaluation concluded that Gilmore was not entirely in control of his actions, according to Marino and the judge.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jihee Suh argued that Gilmore should receive more than two years behind bars.

“His conduct was akin to embezzlement and theft,” she said. A light sentence would send a message that the rich and powerful are treated differently, she said.

The judge agreed that Gilmore, a partner and shareholder in the Toms River firm Gilmore & Monahan, should have known better as a lawyer, although she said she was moved by 42 letters she received vouching for Gilmore’s character, including one from Gilmore’s ex-wife.

Gilmore must also pay money he still owes, and he will not be allowed to open new checking accounts or credit cards without the probation board’s approval, among other restrictions.

If Gilmore is locked up, his lawyer said afterward that he may only spend around six months in jail before being released to a halfway house.

A bail hearing will be later this year.

After his conviction on federal charges last April, Gilmore resigned as chairman of the Ocean County Republican Committee, a position he had held since the mid-1990s. In that role, he was one of the state’s most powerful Republicans for decades, influencing Republican politics throughout New Jersey in the state’s reddest county.

Ocean County has more than 143,800 registered Republicans, according to recent statistics from the state’s Division of Elections. It’s one of only six of the state’s 21 counties where Republicans outnumber Democrats in party registration. And the margin in Ocean County is the widest out of that six.

That means Republicans seeking statewide office need to run up big numbers in Ocean County to counter Democrats, who outnumber the GOP in the Garden State by about 2-to-1.

NJ Advance Media staff writers Matt Arco, Joe Atmonavage and Jeff Goldman contributed to this report.