

How Dr. Death killed prosecutor's job

He has no job, and hasn't started looking. He'd like to teach, but hasn't ruled out politics. He doesn't want to go back to private practice and be "a mouthpiece." He will continue to speak out against assisted suicide. Dick Thompson is at ease.

for 16, is leaving in about six weeks, when successor David G. Gorecyn takes the oath of office.

"I'm leaving with my head held high," Thompson said. "I believe I did the right thing."

As he reflected on his tenure in the prosecutor's office, Thompson acknowledged some regrets — foremost being his loss in the August Republican primary to Gorecyn — and a great deal of satisfaction.

"I appreciate the opportunity the people of Oakland County gave me to serve as their prosecuting attorney," he said. "But I certainly understand the democratic process."

There's no question in Thompson's mind that his firm stance against assisted suicide, and his prosecution of Kevorkian, are the reasons his career as prosecutor is coming to a premature end.

"The Free Press did an exit poll," Thompson said. "A majority (of those responding) thought the job I did as prosecutor was excellent or very good. But 44 percent said they voted against me because I was prosecuting Kevorkian."

Gorecyn said most of his support came from people opposed to my position against assisted suicide.

During his years as prosecutor, the office handled more than 47,000 felonies with a 98 percent conviction rate, Thompson said. "But people were judging me on two cases — my two cases against Kevorkian."

This prosecutor was referring to the two high-profile trials with Kevorkian as defendant his office lost in Oakland Circuit Court this year. His office has since charged the retired pathologist with 19 other counts related to the state's common law against assisted suicide or practicing without a valid license.

Thompson won't be around the office when those latest charges are resolved. Regardless of the outcome, the outgoing prosecutor said, he will continue to speak out against assisted suicide and what he sees as the moral and ethical quagmire to which it inevitably will lead.

"I've got dozens of invitations to speak about assisted suicide," Thompson said. And he is "absolutely committed" to what he considers to be a moral struggle. He uses the proverbial slippery slope analogy and argues

society — starting in Oakland County — is on its way to chaos.

"Six years ago, Kevorkian rationalized to the public that all he was doing was offering his services to the terminally ill suffering from excruciating pain," Thompson said. "He doesn't talk about that any more, he talks about 'quality of life.'"

"Once you start talking about 'quality of life,' you're talking about a subjective evaluation, and there's no way to control it. Once you accept physician assisted suicide on the basis of

free choice, or patient autonomy, there's no principled way to control it."

Thompson insists the ethical questions are enormous.

"Is assisted suicide really something we want to legalize?" he said. "Are the dangers greater than the benefits to be achieved?"

In the Netherlands, the unintended consequences of legalizing assisted suicide should be reason for concern, Thompson said. Assisted suicide has

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BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

It may have cost him a job he loves, but outgoing Oakland Prosecutor Richard Thompson doesn't regret his opposition to assisted suicide, or his prosecution of its leading advocate, Dr. Jack Kevorkian.

Polls may show a majority of people favor legalizing assisted suicide, Thompson said. "But it's the wrong public policy," he insisted on his 23-year career in the prosecutor's office draws to a close.

Thompson, who was prosecutor for 8 years and chief assistant under L. Brooks Patterson

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