



Trump trial: Opening arguments to begin as Trump flouts gag order and attorney previews defense

Description

US : Opening arguments in former President Trump’s historic and unprecedented criminal trial are set to begin Monday morning, and the judge is also expected to rule on several motions that could make the trial even more difficult for the former president.

The full jury of 12, plus six alternate jurors, were selected and sworn in on Friday after four days of jury selection.

Judge Juan Merchan, who is presiding over the trial, instructed jurors on Friday not to discuss or to research anything relating to the former president’s case over the weekend or while serving on the panel.

Merchan said o s.

Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, has been charged by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg with 34 counts of falsifying business records in the first degree.

The charges are related to alleged hush money payments made to adult film actress Stormy Daniels ahead of the 2016 presidential election.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to all counts. He has blasted the trial as pure politics, a “political persecution” and maintains his innocence.

The former president, and the first ever to be a defendant in a criminal trial, vowed to “tell the truth” if he takes the stand.

Trump attorney Will Scharf told Fox News Channel on Sunday that the case should never have been brought, and that the facts are on his client’s side.

“While the prosecution and the media are hell-bent on sensationalizing this case, we’re focusing on the facts because the facts show that President Trump did absolutely nothing wrong,” Scharf said.

“This is a business records case, those business records accurately reflected payments to one of President Trump’s lawyers as legal retainer fees.

Additionally, those records weren’t actually entered by President Trump. He was busy running the country from the White House while all this was happening in Trump Tower in New York.”

The former president is subject to a gag order, which Merchan imposed upon him last month before the trial began.

Merchan ordered that Trump cannot make or direct others to make public statements about witnesses concerning their potential participation or about counsel in the case – other than Bragg – or about court staff, DA staff or family members of staff.

Merchan also ordered that Trump cannot make or direct others to make public statements about any prospective juror or chosen juror. But on Saturday, he let loose with an all-caps rant on his social media platform.

Bragg argued in the first week of the trial that Trump has violated his gag order more than seven times, and wants him to pay a \$1,000 fine. Bragg, in his motion, urged the judge to warn the former president that another violation could be punishable by up to 30 days’ incarceration.

Trump and his defense attorneys have argued that the former president and presumptive Republican presidential nominee should not be bound by the gag order, and said it violates his First Amendment rights, as well as the First Amendment rights of his supporters.

The judge is expected to rule on whether Trump actually violated the order by early next week.

Also Monday, Merchan said he would make a decision on what evidence Bragg’s team can use in their effort to “discredit” the former president should he testify in his own defense.

Bragg, in a filing last week, said he intends to use Trump’s alleged prior “misconduct and criminal acts” to discredit him.

But Trump has never been convicted of a crime.

Bragg’s office said it intends to refer to information from New York Attorney General Letitia James’ case against the former president and the determination from New York Judge Arthur Engoron after the months-long non-jury civil fraud trial against Trump and his family.

Engoron ruled Trump was liable for fraud and “falsifying business records,” “issuing false financial statements,” “conspiracy to falsify false financial statements,” “insurance fraud” and “conspiracy to commit insurance fraud.”

Trump was required to post a slashed judgment bond of \$175 million as he appeals the ruling.

That trial took place without a jury. Trump's defense attorneys Friday objected to any cross-examination of the former president related to James' case and Engoron's ruling due to the appellate division's decision to put the judgment on pause during appeal.

But prosecutor Matthew Colangelo said the findings from Engoron showed "persistent and repeated fraud and illegality."

While the appellate division did pause the judgment, Colangelo said it says nothing about the merits of the case.

Meanwhile, Bragg's office also intends to use information from E. Jean Carroll's defamation case against Trump, and more.

Trump defense attorneys on Friday said each piece of "evidence" Bragg's team hopes to use are "just distractions."

Trump has said he will testify in his defense at the trial, telling reporters last week: "I tell the truth."

Merchan said he will reserve his decision on what information prosecutors can cross-examine the president with until Monday morning.

By Brooke Singman

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