

'2016: Obama's America' Filmmaker Faces 'Straw Donor' Charges in May Trial

A U.S. judge set a May 19 trial date on Tuesday for conservative commentator Dinesh D'Souza to face charges he used straw donors to make illegal contributions to a U.S. Senate candidate in New York in 2012.

D'Souza, a former policy adviser to President Ronald Reagan and the author of several best-selling books, was indicted in January on one count of making illegal contributions in the names of others, and one count of causing false statements to be made.

Prosecutors accuse D'Souza, 52, of directing individuals to contribute \$20,000 to the campaign of Republican candidate Wendy Long, who lost a bid for the Senate seat of incumbent Democrat Kirsten Gillibrand in New York in 2012.

D'Souza subsequently reimbursed the individuals, the indictment said. While not named, one of the donors lived at the time with D'Souza, while another worked for him, according to a prosecutor at a previous hearing.

D'Souza denies wrongdoing, and his lawyer, Benjamin Brafman, said at Tuesday's hearing there "is not a scintilla of evidence this was a corrupt effort by Mr. D'Souza."

U.S. District Judge Richard Berman, who set the trial date, said the proceedings are expected to last about a week.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Carrie Cohen told Berman the parties had engaged in plea talks. But D'Souza's lawyer suggested it was unlikely his client would avoid trial.

"My guess is we'll see you at trial," Benjamin Brafman,

D'Souza's lawyer, told the judge at Manhattan federal court.

A staunch critic of President Barack Obama, D'Souza directed the 2012 film, "2016: Obama's America."

No stranger to controversy, D'Souza resigned from his post as president of King's College, a small Christian college in New York City, in 2012 after admitting he had become engaged before his divorce was final. He has been an outspoken defender of traditional marriage.

Reporting by Nate Raymond; editing by Edith Honan and Gunna Dickson

2014 Thompson Reuters. All rights reserved.