

Trump CFO's lawyer says he suspects more charges in NY tax case

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The Trump Organization's longtime finance chief Allen Weisselberg, center with mask, after leaving a New York courtroom on Monday [Craig Ruttle/AP Photo]

New York, September 22 (RHC)-- A lawyer for former Alan Weisselberg, the indicted Trump Organization chief financial officer, told a New York judge he has "strong reason to believe" more charges will be forthcoming in the state's continuing criminal investigation into former President Donald Trump's private real estate empire.

Lawyer Bryan Scarlatos made the remark during Weisselberg's first court appearance since his July 1 arraignment on tax fraud charges. Scarlatos did not say what led him to believe more people would be charged in the closely watched case.

Weisselberg has pleaded not guilty to charges he collected more than \$1.7m in off-the-books compensation across a 15-year period, including apartment rent, car payments and school tuition.

In recent weeks, a pair of Trump Organization executives have testified before a grand jury, which is continuing to meet behind closed doors to hear testimony and review evidence in the case.

The 74-year-old Weisselberg has intimate knowledge of the Trump Organization's financial dealings from nearly five decades at the company. The charges against him could enable prosecutors to pressure him to cooperate with the investigation and tell them what he knows, but so far there have been no signs of that.

"Mr Weisselberg is separate from the Trump Organization. He is the only individual here whose liberty is at stake," Scarlatos said. "What I am concerned about is that he will become collateral damage in a larger fight between the Trump Organization and the DA's office."

Scarlatos raised the issue of more possible indictments while arguing for more time to review up to six million pages of documents that he said prosecutors were turning over as evidence, calling it "a Herculean task" and saying new indictments would create a "moving target" for the defence.

Prosecutors said Weisselberg is "no stranger" to many of the documents because they include Trump Organization business records that the executive would have produced or reviewed as part of his job.

Judge Juan Manuel Merchan gave both sides until early next year to file motions and responses. He said he would decide on motions at a July 12, 2022 hearing. Merchan said he expected to set a trial date at that time and would likely schedule it for the end of August or beginning of September next year.

"The reason I mention it now is that it's on everybody's radar," Merchan said. "I don't have an exact date yet." Trump's company is charged in the case, which prosecutors have described as a "sweeping and audacious" tax fraud scheme.

Weisselberg sat quietly next to his lawyers at Monday's brief hearing and did not speak to reporters on his way to and from court. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, everyone wore masks and the courtroom had clear plastic partitions between various parties.

Trump himself has not been charged with any wrongdoing... yet. And he has condemned New York authorities' two-year investigation into his business dealings as a "political witch-hunt". Trump claims his company's actions were standard practice in the business and in no way a crime.

According to the indictment, from 2005 through this year, the Trump Organization and Weisselberg cheated tax authorities by conspiring to pay senior executives off the books by way of lucrative fringe benefits and other means. Weisselberg alone was accused of defrauding the federal government, state

and city out of more than \$900,000 in unpaid taxes and undeserved tax refunds.

The most serious charge against Weisselberg, grand larceny, carries five to 15 years in prison. The tax fraud charges against the company are punishable by a fine of double the amount of unpaid taxes, or \$250,000, whichever is larger.

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