

SOS pleads not guilty

Written by By Andy Lyman NM Political Report
Friday, 18 September 2015 08:37



Secretary of State Dianna Duran plead not guilty to 64 counts Sept. 15. The charges related to using campaign finance money for her personal use: including fraud and money laundering.

Duran appeared in person in district court in Santa Fe. She was released on her own recognizance.

The courtroom filled with a small crowd of about 15 people, mostly media, watching from monitors in the hallway.

Duran's attorney asked the court to dismiss 15, of the 64 charges, for on a variety of reasons ranging from the location of the hearing to how the New Mexico Attorney General filed the charges.

First Judicial District Court Judge Glenn Ellington denied the motions to dismiss the charges.

An assistant attorney general, representing the state, asked the court to deny Duran the ability to leave the state. He also asked that she not have access to public funds and have no contact with potential witnesses.

Ellington said Duran could leave the state on official business with the permission of the court. Duran will not be permitted to drink alcohol. She is allowed to speak with members of her staff with the condition that she does not speak about her case.

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The next hearing is scheduled for Oct. 23.

After the hearing, Duran left the courthouse just as quietly as she arrived. Duran made no comment to the media.

The Attorney General's office did not provide a comment to the media either.

It was the first time that Duran was seen in public, since charges were filed against her two weeks ago. After New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas announced the 64 charges related to misuse of campaign finances, Duran was not present in her office. But, her staff maintained that she kept in contact with the office and remained involved in day-to-day operations.

Many have since called for Duran to resign from her position, and Democratic lawmakers called for the House to start impeachment proceedings. Two weeks ago, Speaker of the House Don Tripp, R-Socorro, announced the members of a special committee to consider impeachment.

The Legislative Finance Committee is scheduled to discuss funding for the special committee later today.

No statewide elected official has ever been impeached.

At the same time as Duran's hearing, the Legislative Finance Committee voted to approve funds that will pay for the special committee made up of Democratic and Republican representatives. The committee would decide whether or not the full House should vote on impeachment. If the House votes to impeach, the full Senate could sit as a jury in a trial to remove Duran from office.

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New Mexico Political Report spoke with Rep. Gail Chasey, D-Albuquerque, one of the impeachment committee's co-chairs. She said she wasn't sure exactly how the meetings would be structured, but was confident that the first meeting would be open to the public.

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