

## Corruption trial of former Alabama governor starts

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By Verna Gates

MONTGOMERY, Alabama (Reuters) - Voters should decide the fate of Democratic former Alabama Gov. Don Siegelman, who is campaigning for re-election while on trial on corruption charges, his attorney told the court on Monday.

Siegelman, 60, is accused of trading political favors for gifts and donations during his term as governor of the southern U.S. state from 1999 to 2003. He called the charges against him a political attack by Republicans trying to thwart his attempt to win another term in the governor's mansion.

"It's about this campaign by people who want to impact the outcome of the governor's race," Siegelman said as his trial began in U.S. District Court.

The trial is expected to end before the June 6 primary election, when Siegelman faces Lt. Gov. Lucy Baxley in the race for the Democratic nomination.

Siegelman is charged with bribery, extortion, obstructing justice, fraud and racketeering, and could face more than 50 years in prison if convicted.

Prosecutors said Siegelman accepted cash, campaign contributions and even a motorcycle as bribes for arranging backdoor deals involving state business. Acting U.S. Attorney Louis Franklin said in opening statements that Siegelman had violated his oath to faithfully fulfill his duties.

Three co-defendants are on trial with Siegelman, including former HealthSouth chief Richard Scrushy, who is accused of paying Siegelman a \$500,000 bribe to win an appointment to a hospital regulatory board.

Also on trial are Siegelman's former chief of staff, Paul Hamrick, and former Alabama Transportation Director Mack Roberts.

Prosecutors said many of those scheduled to testify against Siegelman were his own friends and people who worked for him.

Siegelman's attorney, Vince Kilborn, told jurors that at least two of them had been convicted of crimes and were testifying in hopes of reducing their own sentences.

"You will see a bunch of liars, con artists and thieves who are dead men walking. They are out to save their own skin in telling what is not true," Kilborn said.

Republican Gov. Bob Riley defeated Siegelman by just 3,000 votes in the 2002 governor's race, and is seeking re-election.

Riley faces a Republican primary challenge from Roy Moore, who lost his state Supreme Court seat after refusing a federal court order to remove a Ten Commandments monument he had installed in the state judicial building. A federal judge had ruled the monument was an unconstitutional endorsement of religion.