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judge in Hartford, Connecticut discussed on Monday the jury selection process and admissible testimony.

Jan. 15, 2013

With a trial in set to begin on Jan. 24 over a "Women's Gifting Table," attorneys and a judge in Hartford, Connecticut, discussed on Monday the jury selection process and admissible testimony.

A key issue is whether and how the terms "pyramid scheme" or "Ponzi scheme" can be used during proceedings.

The trial in U.S. District Court here is expected to continue through mid-February. Judge Alvin W. Thompson estimated Feb. 15, with Feb. 20 possible.

Assistant U. S. Attorney Douglas P. Morabito said in Monday's pretrial conference that he has a list of some 64 witnesses, while Norm Pattis, attorney for defendant Donna Bello, said there are more than 100 pages of emails to be entered as exhibits.

Bello and co-defendant Jill Platt, both of Guilford, will be tried together on federal charges of conspiracy to defraud the Internal Revenue Service, four counts of filing a false tax return and 12 counts of wire fraud and conspiracy to commit wire fraud for their alleged leadership in the Women's Gifting Table.

Bettejane Hopkins of Essex had faced the same charges. She pleaded guilty last month to one count of conspiracy to defraud the IRS.

The government has deemed the "gifting table" an illegal pyramid scheme and plans to hear testimony from Kenneth Kelly, an employee of the Federal Trade Commission who has calculated that 87.5 percent of those who participate will lose money.

Jonathan J. Einhorn, Platt's attorney, recently filed a motion saying Kelly should not

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Einhorn requested that "pyramid scheme" and "Ponzi scheme" be stricken from the indictment and that government witnesses be told not to use the terms.

Prosecutors argue that the phrases are "not overly prejudicial" and help describe what the defendants are accused of.

Had new recruits to the table known it was a pyramid scheme, "I think they will testify they would not have joined," Morabito said.

Thompson expects to rule on the motions in the next few days.

Barbara Hamburg, a Madison woman who was involved in a gifting table, was killed in 2010, and this came up Monday. Morabito said witnesses have been advised that the Hamburg homicide "is not an issue. ... The government doesn't want the jury to think that, somehow, this woman's murder was related to her participation in gifting tables."

Morabito said he expects to present testimony from lawyers who allegedly gave advice to table participants. Women involved often told recruits that attorneys and accountants gave their approval.

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Income Tax

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