

Jefferson, U.S. debate 'bribery' meaning

by UPI

NEW ORLEANS -- Attorneys for former U.S. Rep. William Jefferson, D-La., and federal prosecutors are battling over the definition of bribery, court documents show.

Calling the Jefferson's contention that his alleged conduct didn't meet the definition of bribery, the Justice Department in briefs filed Friday accused his attorneys of recycling "many of his previously rejected legal theories all of which seek to shield his illegal and corrupt schemes from the reach of the federal bribery statutes," The Times-Picayune newspaper in New Orleans reported.

Jefferson is accused of accepting bribes from businesses seeking his help in gaining meetings with top officials in Western Africa. Prosecutors released copies of 17 letters from Jefferson using official congressional stationery purporting to show that, the newspaper said.

But Jefferson's attorneys, in a similar brief filed Friday, contended Justice Department hasn't shown that the conduct it has alleged doesn't constitute bribery, saying that because helping companies secure contracts in Western Africa aren't part of a congressman's official acts, there is no bribery, The Times-Picayune reported.

U.S. District Judge T.S. Ellis III reportedly will to consider the arguments during a May 1 hearing, 25 days before the former congressman's trial is scheduled to start.

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