



Oklahoma Attorney Slams Johnson & Johnson Witness; Opioid Trial Gets Heated

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The historic opioid trial in Oklahoma got heated as an attorney grilled a key witness for Johnson & Johnson, a company that is facing charges for their alleged role in spreading the opioid epidemic. Brad Beckworth, a lawyer representing the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office, demanded to know whether drug companies acted as "snake oil salesmen" in promoting their opioid products.

The courtroom drama happened during the sixth week of the trial, one that is testing whether a state can hold a drug company accountable for the opioid epidemic's impact on its residents.

Beckworth was questioning Dr. Timothy Fong, a psychiatrist with UCLA who treats patients with opioid use disorder, who testified for Johnson & Johnson.

The exchange grew heated as Beckworth threw his hands in the air after constant objections by Johnson & Johnson lawyers. "At some point, I have to be able to cross-examine this guy," the Oklahoma lawyer snapped.

Beckworth also slammed Fong for not telling any of its patients, including those who are addicted to opioid painkillers, that he was testifying on behalf of Johnson & Johnson.

“How can you go back and look any patient in the eye that you treat for opioid use disorder after coming here and testifying on behalf of this drug company in this case about the opioid crisis?” Beckworth said. “How are you going to do that?”

Mike Yoder, an attorney representing Johnson & Johnson, objected, saying the question was out of line. Cleveland County District Judge Thad Balkman sustained the motion. Click the link to see Auburn's top rehab placement programs.

At one point, Fong referred to some companies that provide treatment for opioid use disorder as “snake oil salesmen,” and Beckworth seized on the phrase.

“Do you have an opinion about whether drug companies are just like snake oil salesmen when it came to promoting opioids for the treatment of chronic pain in America?” Beckworth asked.

“I don't have an opinion on the pharmaceutical companies' marketing or selling opioid products in America,” Fong replied.

Beckworth then noted that it was peculiar for the defendant's witness to go all the way from California but not have “an opinion on the matter.” “I'm an expert paid for my time,” Fong said. “I'm not paid for my opinions.”

Beckworth emphasized that Fong is “Johnson & Johnson's paid expert.” The lawyer asked Fong: “Why didn't we have an opioid crisis in 1994?” And Johnson and Johnson's lawyer objected saying it was outside of Fong's area of expertise.

“If he can't answer that, he shouldn't be in the courtroom,” Beckworth said. “Unbelievable!”

Beckworth also poked holes in other bits of Fong's testimony, including his criticism of Dr. Andrew Kolodny, who had testified for the state about Johnson & Johnson's alleged role in the opioid epidemic. “I was not paid to attack Andrew Kolodny,” Fong said. “I was paid for my time.”

Beckworth replied: “Were you paid for the truth?” “I was paid to provide my time, to provide opinions on matters that they asked me to,” Fong said.

The state has said more than 6,100 Oklahomans died as a result of a prescription drug overdose from 2000 to 2017. It has proposed a \$17.5 billion plan to combat the epidemic over 30 years.

Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter accused Johnson & Johnson and its subsidiaries of creating a public nuisance for its alleged role in the opioid crisis, which is now being considered the worst drug crisis in US history. The attorney general said that the drug companies cost the state billions of dollars, destroying thousands of lives.

The current opioid crisis is causing thousands of overdose-related casualties, with over 130 people in the US dying to it every day.

Johnson & Johnson has denied any wrongdoing, saying it followed the law and acted appropriately in its marketing and promotion of opioids. Drugmakers like Purdue Pharma and Teva Pharmaceuticals are also facing similar charges across the state. The Oklahoma trial is the first of its kind in the nation. Legal scholars say that it could set a major precedent for the thousands of lawsuits filed across the states.

?My general impression of the state's case is that it was strong and persuasive and that Johnson & Johnson needs to counter that case with a strong, persuasive case of its own,? said Carl Tobias, a law professor at the University of Richmond.

The trial is expected to last for at least three more weeks, with Johnson & Johnson presenting more witnesses during the defense phase.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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