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Chopra Defeats Sex Harassment Suit Still Fighting Verdict in Prior Blackmail Case

APBNews, AP, March 7, 2000
By Randy Dotinga

SAN DIEGO (APBnews.com) -- Spiritual guru Deepak Chopra has been vindicated by a court system that just weeks ago he denounced as corrupt. After deliberating for 10 minutes, a jury unanimously rejected a lawsuit by one of Chopra's former co-workers that claimed she was fired because she accused Chopra of sexual harassment.

Attorneys allege bias

A court hearing is scheduled March 15 to discuss whether the previous verdict against Chopra should be thrown out, Flynn said. Chopra's attorneys allege that Murphy was biased against them, based on his comment about DiMare. The main issues of the previous case -- the prostitute's story and the alleged blackmail -- were missing from the current lawsuit. Instead, the two-week trial focused almost entirely on arcane matters of workplace law. However, the trial did touch briefly on issues of sex, obsession and the celebrity-strewn world that Chopra inhabits. For example, attorneys argued over the meaning of a plane trip that Weaver took with Chopra and one of his followers, actor Marlon Brando. Verdict in 'three minutes' Flynn, Chopra's attorney, said jurors told him they spent only about three minutes discussing the merits of the case. "Then they felt guilty about coming in [after] three minutes. They sat around and chatted for five minutes [before returning]," Flynn said. "I've never seen anything like it, and I've been litigating for 30 years."

Peter Friesen, Weaver's attorney, could not be reached for comment. Weaver worked in the mid-1990s with Chopra at a San Diego mind-body center that he helped run. She organized seminars for the center. Weaver claimed that Chopra fired her because she blew the whistle on his sexual harassment of her. She said she lost her job when the center closed and Chopra did not hire her in another capacity. Friesen had accused Chopra of lying on the stand when he said his relationship with Weaver was proper. Chopra is "a man who came here without any respect for our institution and the sanctity of our proceedings," Friesen charged. In fact, the lawyer said, a company official had declared that Weaver's employment depended on whether she got along with Chopra. Another official allegedly told her, "Chopra doesn't want you around here because you don't adore him enough."

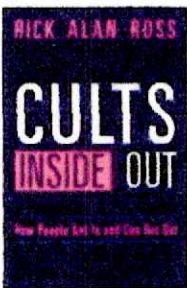
Weaver has left the mind-body health field and is now training to be a veterinarian. Hospital chain was employer in her rebuttal, Chopra's attorney, Carla DiMare, said the guru was not Weaver's employer and had nothing to do with her termination. The hospital chain that ran the mind-body center was responsible for all hiring and firing, she said. "You can have a termination that's not wrongful, and that's what we have here," DiMare said. "She was terminated because [the hospital chain] was having financial problems."

Friesen had argued that Chopra served as his client's employer, even though Weaver was paid by the hospital chain that operated the center. DiMare also accused Weaver of lying her way through her testimony. Weaver was "stolically immune" to a dozen witnesses who testified against her, DiMare said. Chopra is on a book tour and missed most of the trial. His wife, however, attended in his place.

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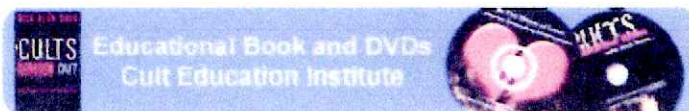
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