U.S. NEWS

What happens next in The Onion's effort to buy Alex Jones' Infowars

morning, Infowars and its websites were back up and running for reasons that were not entirely clear.

At a hastily called court hearing in Houston on Thursday, Judge Christopher Lopez ordered another hearing to be held next week. He wants to know what happened with the auction and how the bankruptcy trustee chose The Onion over the only other bidder — a company affiliated with a Jones product-selling website.

A court hearing is typically held after a bankruptcy auction to finalize the winning bids and sales, and to hear any objections, so the process in Jones' case hasn't strayed far from the usual — yet.

Here's a look at the bankruptcy auction and what could happen next:

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Why was Infowars up for auction?

Jones declared personal bankruptcy in late 2022 after he was ordered to pay nearly $1.5 billion to families of victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut who sued him for defamation for repeatedly calling the massacre a hoax aimed at increasing gun control.

Relatives of some of the 20 first graders and six educators who were killed in the 2012 shooting said Jones' followers harassed and threatened them as a result of his lies. Jones has since acknowledged the shooting was "100% real."

As part of the bankruptcy, Jones' personal assets and Infowars' parent company, the Jones-owned Free Speech Systems, were to be sold at auction, with the Sandy Hook families and Jones' other creditors getting the proceeds.

How The Onion was named the winning bidder

The bankruptcy trustee overseeing the sale chose from sealed bids. He received two.

One was from the Jones-affiliated First United American Companies, which offered $3.5 million, the trustee revealed in court Thursday. The other, from The Onion, was lower but contained an incentive by some of the Sandy Hook families to forgo a portion of the sale proceeds and give it to other Jones' creditors, the trustee, Christopher Murray, said.

Murray said he determined The Onion's offer, although unusual, was better overall, because it would provide more money to Jones' creditors than the other bid. But he also said he could not yet put a dollar figure on The Onion's bid when the families' offer was factored in.

Judge Lopez indicated that he had expected prospective buyers would be given a chance to outbid each other after the bids were unsealed.

His 20-page order on the sale procedures in September, however, made such a bidding round optional. And it gave broad authority to Murray to conduct the sale, including the power to reject any bid, no matter how high, that was "contrary to the best interests" of Jones, his company and their creditors.

Infowars reopens after shutting down

Murray had Infowars' website and studio shut down Thursday as he began the process of securing assets, a lawyer for the trustee said in court Thursday. But on Friday, Infowars and its websites were back up and running.

On his show, Jones told listeners that Murray had told him it was wrong to shut down Infowars before the sale was finalized. Murray and his lawyer did not immediately return phone messages and emails seeking comment.

What's next in court?

The judge said he had concerns about the auction process and transparency. Both sides are expected to present evidence at next week's hearing.

Jones and a lawyer for First United American Companies allege Murray improperly selected The Onion's bid and unexpectedly changed the sale process Monday after the sealed bids were submitted, by deciding not to hold a round of bidding on Wednesday. They also questioned the legality of The Onion's bid.

Murray said denied doing anything improper and said he followed the judge's auction rules.

Lopez would rule on whether the trustee properly ran the auction and selected The Onion as the winning bidder. If not, the possibilities include reopening the sale and holding an auction where potential buyers could outbid each other. The judge has the ultimate authority to accept or reject any sale of Infowars.

An exact date for the hearing had not yet been scheduled by Friday afternoon.

What are The Onion's plans for Infowars?

The Onion — which carries the banner of "America's Finest News Source" on its masthead — was founded in the 1980s and for decades has skewered politics and pop culture. It hopes to reopen the Infowars website in January as a parody of Jones and other conspiracy theorists.

"Our goal in a couple of years is for people to think of Infowars as the funniest and dumbest website that exists," Ben Collins, the Onion's CEO, told The Associated Press. "It was previously the dumbest website that exists."