

# [***What we've learned so far in the Trump hush money trial and what to watch for as it wraps up***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C2G-BT11-DYMD-60SH-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

May 19, 2024 Sunday 11:34 AM GMT

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**Section:** DOMESTIC NEWS; POLITICAL NEWS; STATE AND REGIONAL

**Length:** 1392 words

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**Dateline:** NEW YORK

**Body**

NEW YORK — Testimony in the [*hush money trial of Donald Trump*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-hush-money-opening-stormy-daniels-6beee9b99114898ee0dd60185d43bac5) is set to conclude in the coming days, putting the landmark case on track for jury deliberations that will determine whether it ends in a mistrial, an acquittal — or the first-ever felony conviction of a former American president.

Jurors over the course of a month have heard testimony about sex and bookkeeping, tabloid journalism and presidential ***politics***. Their task ahead will be to decide whether [*prosecutors who have charged Trump with 34 counts of falsifying business records*](https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-arraignment-hush-money-81225510ef7638494852816878f612f0) have proved their case beyond a reasonable doubt.

Here's a look at what the two sides have argued, who has been missing from the case, what to listen for in the final days and what prosecutors will have to prove to secure a conviction.

**THE PROSECUTION'S CASE**

Through witnesses including a porn actor, a veteran tabloid publisher and longtime Trump aides, the prosecution aimed to link the presumptive Republican nominee for the White House this year to a hush money scheme during the 2016 presidential campaign that resulted in the filing of phony business records to mask the alleged conspiracy.

Jurors heard testimony that two women and a doorman were paid tens of thousands of dollars to keep quiet during that campaign about stories that, had they emerged, could have embarrassed Trump. Jurors heard claims of sex, saw copies of texts, emails and checks and [*listened to a secret recording*](https://apnews.com/article/hush-money-trial-new-fines-testimony-trump-fe6995afbc96650b67f46d813ab05f06) in which Trump and his then-lawyer can be heard discussing a plan to buy the silence of a Playboy model.

One witness, David Pecker, the former publisher of the National Enquirer and a longtime Trump friend, [*testified that he had agreed to be the “eyes and ears" of the Trump campaign*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-hush-money-national-enquirer-d44d4a7ce66cc08edb5981b3afb882ba) by alerting it to any negative stories about him.

[*Actor Stormy Daniels told jurors, in occasionally graphic terms,*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-hush-money-gag-order-d853768fff5fafbdee55623579889140) about a sexual encounter she says she had with Trump in 2006; he denies the whole thing. She described being offered $130,000 by Trump's then-lawyer and personal fixer, Michael Cohen, to remain silent after she said she was looking for ways to sell the story and get it out there.

[*Cohen, the prosecution's star witness,*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-stormy-daniels-michael-cohen-hush-money-f96dd7289cf952145cdd6737b29add3d) spent days on the stand recounting what he said was Trump's role in authorizing the hush money payments. Cohen described Trump as anxious that stories alleging extramarital sex could harm his campaign standing with female voters and said the then-candidate had directed him to suppress the stories, quoting him as saying exhortations including, “Just do it” and “We need to stop this from getting out.”

**THE DEFENSE POSITION**

Trump's legal team has not yet called witnesses, and it remains unclear what exactly his lawyers will do when it is their turn to present evidence.

But they have signaled through their questioning of the prosecution's witnesses specific areas where they think they can sow doubt for the jury, contesting along the way the foundational premises of the case.

They have disputed Daniels' account of a hotel suite sexual encounter, [*with the actor facing an aggressive cross-examination*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-hush-money-stormy-daniels-d8be160e53c8050bf788d7772f483a64) from a defense lawyer who said at one point, “You have made all of this up, right?” Daniels said no.

And they have suggested that Trump's celebrity status made him an easy extortion target. They [*grilled the Los Angeles lawyer who negotiated Daniels' deal*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-hush-money-stormy-daniels-cohen-9be06e3d33c25af7060552a44001cc1a) about other celebrities from whom he had previously “extracted” money in exchange for a client's silence.

But the most consequential cross-examination, by far, has been that of Cohen. The defense has tried to depict him as a fame-seeking fabulist desperate to contribute to a Trump conviction.

The cross-examination began in splashy fashion, [*with Trump attorney Todd Blanche asking the former fixer*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-cohen-hush-money-stormy-daniels-735aadfd1ce015e05ba955c203a96f1b) if he recalled referring to the lawyer by an expletive on TikTok last month. Prosecutors objected, the judge summoned the parties to the bench and the question was stricken. But the point was clear.

Over the course of hours, Blanche refreshed Cohen's recollection about a litany of colorful but often profane monikers he had assigned Trump — “Cheeto-dusted cartoon villain” was one — as a way to paint Cohen as egregiously biased, blinded by hatred and therefore not credible.

There was [*also an avalanche of questions about Cohen's past crimes and lies*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-hush-money-michael-cohen-ec08be1219703deb3cd10604844deacb). Blanche forced Cohen to acknowledge that he fibbed under oath during his own 2018 plea hearing about not feeling pressure to plead guilty. In a dramatic moment, Blanche suggested that Cohen had not told the truth when he said he spoke to Trump about the Daniels payment before wiring her lawyer $130,000.

Blanche confronted Cohen with texts indicating that what was on his mind, at least initially, during the phone call were harassing calls he was getting from an apparent 14-year-old prankster.

The strategy was predictable given Cohen's significance to the case but it is too soon to tell how it landed with the jury.

**THE MISSING LINKS?**

Multiple characters pivotal to the saga have been name-dropped in court but have been notably absent from the witness stand.

One is [*Karen McDougal, a Playboy model who has said she had an affair with Trump*](https://apnews.com/hub/karen-mcdougal) and received $150,000 from the National Enquirer in a hush money deal that Cohen helped broker. [*Keith Schiller, Trump's bodyguard,*](https://apnews.com/article/7c93cbbc665d41d89ff2951b0a693255) was described in court as the person who asked Daniels for her phone number on Trump's behalf and was an important conduit for Cohen when he needed to reach Trump.

And then there's [*Allen Weisselberg, the former Trump Organization chief financial officer*](https://apnews.com/article/weisselberg-trump-perjury-new-york-b76cde56c6cb983ab8789f95d5a0c6c0) now serving a five-month jail sentence for lying under oath in the New York attorney general’s civil fraud case against Trump.

Weisselberg did not testify in the hush money trial but he matters because, according to Cohen, he was present for a Trump Tower discussion that arguably most directly links Trump and the reimbursements at the center of the case that prosecutors say are fraudulent.

Cohen says the 2017 Trump Tower meeting occurred on the cusp of Inauguration Day and was where he, Trump and Weisselberg hammered out the mechanics of reimbursing him for the Daniels hush money payment. There, Cohen said, they agreed that the lawyer would receive a total of $420,000 in monthly installments for what would be billed — deceptively, prosecutors say — as legal services.

“He approved it,” Cohen testified. "And he also said: ‘This is going to be one heck of a ride in D.C.”’

Whether jurors will have wanted to have heard from Weisselberg is uncertain, but in a case that centers more on paperwork than sex, the account of that meeting is likely to be held up by prosecutors as a vital piece of evidence and it will be important to see how they return to it as they wrap up their case with closing statements.

**WHAT MUST BE PROVED FOR A CONVICTION?**

To convict Trump of felony falsifying business records, prosecutors must convince jurors beyond a reasonable doubt that he not only falsified or caused business records to be entered falsely, [*but that he did so with intent to commit or conceal another crime*](https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PEN/175.10). Any verdict must be unanimous.

Prosecutors allege that Trump logged Cohen’s repayment as legal expenses to conceal multiple other crimes, including breaches of campaign finance law and a violation of a state election law alleging a conspiracy to promote or prevent an election.

In his opening statement, Assistant District Attorney Matthew Colangelo told jurors the case “is about a criminal conspiracy and a cover-up — an illegal conspiracy to undermine the integrity of a presidential election, and then the steps that Donald Trump took to conceal that illegal election fraud.”

Specifically, prosecutors contend, the payments to McDougal, Daniels and the doorman violated federal restrictions on corporate and individual campaign contributions and were meant to conceal damaging information from the voting public.

Among other evidence, jurors heard testimony about Cohen’s 2018 guilty to a campaign finance crime and the National Enquirer’s nonprosecution agreement and $187,500 fine for the McDougal payment, which the Federal Election Commission considered an [*illegal corporate contribution*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-investigations-donald-trump-campaign-2016-election-2020-campaigns-ee63877891155395375ab72428697d41) to Trump’s campaign.

New York also has a misdemeanor falsifying business records charge, which requires proving only that a defendant made or caused the false entries, but it is not part of Trump’s case and will not be considered by jurors.

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Tucker reported from Washington.

**Load-Date:** May 19, 2024

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