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Trade Trial

The trial threatens to reveal the inner workings of the real estate empire that set Trump on his path to the White House.

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By Patricia Hurtado and Greg Farrell, Bloomberg News (TNS)

Jurors in the Trump Organization's criminal tax fraud trial were shown a lease to an apartment for longtime chief financial officer Allen Weisselberg—signed by Donald Trump himself.

The exhibit came as prosecutors questioned the firm's controller, Jeffrey McConney,

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units of the former president's firm engaged in a scheme over more than a decade to help executives evade payroll taxes by compensating them with company cars, rent-free apartments and other luxuries.

In her opening statement Monday, Executive Assistant District Attorney Susan Hoffinger told the jury that Trump had personally signed off on the payment of private school tuition for Weisselberg's grandchildren.

"Everybody wins here—Allen Weisselberg and these companies," Hoffinger said. "Of course, everybody but the tax authorities."

Weisselberg, the DA's star witness, pleaded guilty in August in an agreement that requires him to testify truthfully against the two units—the only defendants remaining in the case—in exchange for a lighter sentence. The business units say he led the illicit arrangement for his own benefit without their knowledge.

Trump, who faces a variety of other probes and lawsuits even as he considers a presidential run in 2024, has called the case a "witch hunt" and said the same of the others.

In questioning McConney on Tuesday, Assistant DA Joshua Steinglass showed the jury that, under the lease, which ran from May 1, 2005, to April 3, 2007, the 21st-floor apartment was to be occupied by Weisselberg or other Trump employees. That provision could help prosecutors persuade the jurors that it wasn't just a one-off perk for Weisselberg but an amenity, blessed at the company's highest level, that could be used to mask the tax burdens of various executives.

"Whose signature is that?" Steinglass asked McConney, indicating the lease.

"President Trump," McConney said.

Steinglass also questioned McConney on raises Weisselberg got in 2018 and 2019.

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