

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/defense-for-el-chapo-urges-jurors-to-keep-open-mind-11548978176>

U.S.

Defense for 'El Chapo' Urges Jurors to Keep Open Mind

In closing statement, Mexican drug lord's lawyer seeks to undermine credibility of cartel insiders who testified at trial



Defense attorney Jeffrey Lichtman, left, gives closing arguments during the trial of infamous Mexican drug lord Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán Loera, in tie beside his wife, Emma Coronel, in Brooklyn federal court in New York City on Thursday. PHOTO: JANE ROSENBERG/REUTERS

By *Nicole Hong*

Jan. 31, 2019 6:42 pm ET

A lawyer for Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera asked jurors in Brooklyn federal court to look past the Mexican drug lord’s notoriety and acquit him of drug-trafficking charges, dismissing the government’s witnesses over the past three months as liars.

The lawyer, Jeffrey Lichtman, spent his four-hour closing statement discrediting the government’s cooperating witnesses, alleging they lied about everything from the bribes they paid to the murders they committed. He said two witnesses had given conflicting testimony about whether the Sinaloa cartel made its own shirts and hats for cartel members to wear—an indication, he said, that one of them had lied.

Mr. Lichtman suggested U.S. prosecutors were willing to ignore the witnesses' credibility issues because they were so eager to convict Mr. Guzmán. He urged the jurors, who are expected to begin deliberating Monday on the 10 criminal counts against Mr. Guzmán, to keep an open mind.

“You don't have to give in to the myth of El Chapo,” he said.

The government acknowledged in its closing statement that its 14 cooperating witnesses, many of whom worked as top drug traffickers for the Sinaloa cartel, were criminals who testified in hopes of getting a lighter sentence. But prosecutors said their testimony was corroborated by other evidence, including Mr. Guzmán's own phone calls and text messages that were captured on U.S. wiretaps.

RELATED

- Prosecutors Close 'El Chapo' Trial (Jan. 30)
- Government Ends Case Against El Chapo (Jan. 28)
- Witness: Wife of 'El Chapo' Coordinated His 2015 Prison Escape (Jan. 23)
- 'El Chapo' Bribed Former Mexican President, Former Drug Trafficker Tells Court (Jan. 15)
- Help! My Boss Is El Chapo (Jan. 12)
- 'El Chapo' Jury Told of Cartel's Tricks (Jan. 3)

Prosecutors also said the witnesses had a stronger motive to tell the truth because their cooperation agreements would be ripped up if they lied.

Mr. Lichtman sought to raise doubts about whether Mr. Guzmán was the voice on the

recorded phone calls played for jurors, saying, “The voice on those tapes could be anybody.”

Mr. Lichtman gave jurors a theatrical presentation, often using sarcasm to mock the government's witnesses. He would yell but also quiet his voice to a whisper. He referenced the cartoon character “Frito Bandito” and the board game Monopoly. He said the charges against Mr. Guzmán “could happen to anyone.”

Mr. Lichtman tried to portray Mr. Guzmán as a humble man who wasn't wealthy and used “plastic chairs” in his home. The government has accused Mr. Guzmán of making \$14 billion in illicit drug proceeds.

At one point, Mr. Lichtman walked over to Mr. Guzmán's seat and said, "He has feelings, too."

The judge admonished Mr. Lichtman at times, including when he suggested the government had tortured a witness to pressure him to testify.

During the trial, which began in mid-November, the government called more than 50 witnesses and showed jurors hundreds of exhibits. The defense's case lasted 30 minutes, involving one witness and one stipulation indicating Mr. Guzmán used to be in debt.

Throughout trial, the defense used cross-examinations of government witnesses to suggest a conspiracy between the U.S. and Mexican governments to target Mr. Guzmán and turn a blind eye to Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada Garcia. The defense said Mr. Zambada is the Sinaloa cartel's real and only leader.

Mr. Zambada is charged on the same indictment as Mr. Guzmán but is still at large. His brother and son were both arrested and testified at Mr. Guzmán's trial.

The government said the argument is irrelevant to Mr. Guzmán's own guilt and has called the conspiracy claim "preposterous," citing the fact that there was a 2014 capture operation in Mexico against Mr. Zambada. Mr. Guzmán can be convicted of drug-trafficking charges even if he were one of many leaders within the cartel, prosecutors said.

Write to Nicole Hong at nicole.hong@wsj.com

Copyright © 2019 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.