

## Defense in Nichols trial rests after questioning 96 witnesses

*The Associated Press*

McALESTER, Okla. — Defense attorneys rested their case Thursday at the trial of Oklahoma City bombing conspirator Terry Nichols, who faces state murder charges that could carry the death penalty.

Nichols' attorneys questioned 96 witnesses over 11 days in a case that was shortened when Judge Steven Taylor limited the defense's ability to offer evidence of alternative suspects in the bombing, which killed 168 people.

Prosecutors rested their case April 30 after questioning 151 witnesses over 29 days. They planned to question at least a dozen more witnesses to rebut defense testimony.

Closing arguments are tentatively scheduled to begin Monday afternoon.

Taylor on Thursday denied a routine motion by the defense to acquit Nichols on grounds that the prosecution had not met its legal burden of proof.

Nichols, 49, is serving a life prison sentence after a federal jury in 1997 convicted him of conspiracy and involuntary manslaughter in the deaths of eight federal law enforcement agents in the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building.



**Nichols**

In Oklahoma, Nichols is charged with 161 counts of first-degree murder for the deaths of the other 160 victims and one victim's fetus. Nichols was at his home in Herington, Kan., when the 4,000-pound fertilizer bomb was detonated at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. But a procession of prosecution witnesses linked Nichols to the bomb plot.

Prosecutors allege Nichols gathered bomb components, including explosive

ammonium nitrate fertilizer, and helped bomber Timothy McVeigh build the homemade device and pack it into the cargo bay of a Ryder truck. McVeigh was convicted on federal murder charges and executed in June 2001. Prosecutors also allege Nichols robbed an Arkansas gun collector of weapons and gold and silver coins to help finance the plot.

Defense attorneys allege that other coconspirators gave McVeigh substantial help in planning the bombing.

They put several witnesses on the stand who said they saw McVeigh with another man who was not Nichols in the days and even the moments before the bombing.

Other defense witnesses testified that items found at Nichols' home and linked to the bombing by prosecutors could have had benign uses, and that anti-government literature found at the home was the sort of material McVeigh had given to several people.