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Excerpts From The Times's Interview With Trump

By THE NEW YORK TIMES JULY 19, 2017

President Trump spoke on Wednesday with three New York Times reporters — Peter Baker, Michael S. Schmidt and Maggie Haberman — in an exclusive interview in the Oval Office. Also in attendance was Hope Hicks, a White House spokeswoman. At one point, the president’s daughter and adviser Ivanka Trump appeared at the door, and her daughter, Arabella, entered the room.

The following are excerpts from that conversation, transcribed by The Times. They have been lightly edited for content and clarity, and omit several off-the-record comments and asides.

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TRUMP: Hi fellas, how you doing?

BAKER: Good. Good. How was your lunch [with Republican senators]?

TRUMP: It was good. We are very close. It's a tough — you know, health care. Look, Hillary Clinton worked eight years in the White House with her husband as president and having majorities and couldn't get it done. Smart people, tough people — couldn't get it done. Obama worked so hard. They had 60 in the Senate. They had big majorities and had the White House. I mean, ended up giving away the state of Nebraska. They owned the state of Nebraska. Right. Gave it away. Their best senator did one of the greatest deals in the history of politics. What happened to him?

But I think we are going to do O.K. I think we are going to see. I mean, one of my ideas was repeal. But I certainly rather would get repeal and replace, because the next last thing I want to do is start working tomorrow morning on replace. And it is time. It is tough. It's a very narrow path, winding this way. You think you have it, and then you lose four on the other side because you gave. It is a brutal process. And it was for Democrats, in all fairness.

I mean, you think of Hillary Clinton, and you look, she went eight years — very capable — went eight years as the first lady, and could not get health care. So this is not an easy crack. The one thing I'll say about myself, so, Obama was in there for eight years and got Obamacare. Hillary Clinton was in there eight years and they never got Hillarycare, whatever they called it at the time. I am not in here six months, and they'll say, "Trump hasn't fulfilled his agenda." I say to myself, wait a minute, I'm only here a very short period of time compared to Obama. How long did it take to get Obamacare?

BAKER: March, March 2010.

TRUMP: So he was there for more than a year.

HABERMAN: Fourteen months.

TRUMP: And I'm here less than six months, so, ah, you know. Something to think about.

BAKER: We wrote the same stories, though, in August of 2009. "Obama can't get it."

SCHMIDT: It died several times.

HABERMAN: Several times.

TRUMP: Well, it was a tough one. That was a very tough one.

BAKER: He lost that election [the 2010 midterms].

TRUMP: Nothing changes. Nothing changes. Once you get something for pre-existing conditions, etc., etc. Once you get something, it's awfully tough to take it away.

HABERMAN: That's been the thing for four years. When you win an entitlement, you can't take it back.

TRUMP: But what it does, Maggie, it means it gets tougher and tougher. As they get something, it gets tougher. Because politically, you can't give it away. So pre-existing conditions are a tough deal. Because you are basically saying from the moment the insurance, you're 21 years old, you start working and you're paying \$12 a year for insurance, and by the time you're 70, you get a nice plan. Here's something where you walk up and say, "I want my insurance." It's a very tough deal, but it is something that we're doing a good job of.

HABERMAN: Am I wrong in thinking — I've talked to you a bunch of times about this over the last couple years, but you are generally of the view that people should have health care, right? I mean, I think that you come at it from the view of ...

TRUMP: Yes, yes. [garbled]

TRUMP: So I told them today, I don't want to do that. I want to either get it done or not get it done. If we don't get it done, we are going to watch Obamacare go down the tubes, and we'll blame the Democrats. And at some point, they are going to come and say, "You've got to help us."

BAKER: Did the senators want to try again?

TRUMP: I think so. We had a great meeting. Was I late?

[crosstalk]

TRUMP: It was a great meeting. We had 51 show up, other than John.

BAKER: Senator McCain.

TRUMP: That's a lot. Normally when they call for a meeting, you have like 20.

HABERMAN: How about the last one in June? Do you guys remember how many came?

TRUMP: Ah, 49. It was actually 48, but John McCain was there. But I guess we had 51 today, so that counts. That shows the spirit.

BAKER: Who is the key guy?

TRUMP: Well, they are all key. The problem is we have 52 votes. Don't forget, you look at Obama, he had 60. That's a big difference. So, we have 52 votes. Now, I guess we lose Susan Collins. I guess we lose Rand Paul. Then we can't lose any votes. That is a very tough standard. Statistically, you want to bet on that all day long. With that being said, I think we had a great meeting. I think we had a great meeting.

HABERMAN: Where does it go from here, do you think?

TRUMP: Well, I say, let's not vote on repeal. Let's just vote on this. So first, they vote on the vote. And that happens sometime Friday?

HABERMAN: Next week.

TRUMP: Or Monday? Monday. And then they'll vote on this, and we'll see. We have some meetings scheduled today. I think we have six people who are really sort of O.K. They are all good people. We don't have bad people. I know the bad people. Believe me, do I know bad people.

And we have a very good group of people, and I think they want to get there. So we'll see what happens. But it's tough.

SCHMIDT: How's [Mitch] McConnell to work with?

TRUMP: I like him. I mean, he's good. He's good. It's been a tough process for him.

HABERMAN: He's taken on some water.

TRUMP: Yeah. It's been a tough process for him. This health care is a tough deal. I said it from the beginning. No. 1, you know, a lot of the papers were saying — actually, these guys couldn't believe it, how much I know about it. I know a lot about health care. [garbled] This is a very tough time for him, in a sense, because of the importance. And I believe we get there.

This is a very tough time for them, in a sense, because of the importance. And I believe that it's [garbled], that makes it a lot easier. It's a mess. One of the things you get out of this, you get major tax cuts, and reform. And if you add what the people are going to save in the middle income brackets, if you add that to what they're saving with health care, this is like a windfall for the country, for the people. So, I don't know, I thought it was a great meeting. I bet the number's — I bet the real number's four. But let's say six or eight. And everyone's [garbled], so statistically, that's a little dangerous, right?

BAKER: Pretty tight.

TRUMP: I hope we don't have any grandstanders. I don't think we do.

[garbled]

TRUMP: I think it will be pretty bad for them if they did. I don't think we have any — I think it would be very bad for — I think this is something the people want. They've been promised it.

HABERMAN: [In Paris], I don't think I've seen you look like you were enjoying yourself that much since the convention, really.

TRUMP: I have had the best reviews on foreign land. So I go to Poland and make a speech. Enemies of mine in the media, enemies of mine are saying it was the greatest speech ever made on foreign soil by a president. I'm saying, man, they cover [garbled]. You saw the reviews I got on that speech. Poland was beautiful and wonderful, and the reception was incredible.

And then, went to France the following week, because it was the 100th year. [inaudible] The Paris Accord — I wasn't going to get along with France for a little while, because people forget, because it is a very unfair agreement to us. China doesn't get [garbled] until 2030. Russia goes back to 1994 as a standard — a much, much lower standard. India has things that are [garbled]. I want to do the same thing as everyone else. We can't do that? We can't do that? That's O.K. Let me get out. Frankly, the people that like me, love that I got out.

After that, it was fairly surprising. He [President Emmanuel Macron of France] called me and said, "I'd love to have you there and honor you in France,"

having to do with Bastille Day. Plus, it's the 100th year of the First World War. That's big. And I said yes. I mean, I have a great relationship with him. He's a great guy.

HABERMAN: He was very deferential to you. Very.

TRUMP: He's a great guy. Smart. Strong. Loves holding my hand.

HABERMAN: I've noticed.

TRUMP: People don't realize he loves holding my hand. And that's good, as far as that goes.

TRUMP: I mean, really. He's a very good person. And a tough guy, but look, he has to be. I think he is going to be a terrific president of France. But he does love holding my hand.

[crosstalk]

TRUMP: At that note, the cameras are gone. I was standing there with him, with probably hundreds of thousands of people.

HABERMAN: It was a very crowded [garbled].

TRUMP: And it was one of the most beautiful parades I have ever seen. And in fact, we should do one one day down Pennsylvania Ave.

HABERMAN: I wondered if you were going to say that.

TRUMP: I've always thought of that.

HABERMAN: Really?

TRUMP: I've always thought of that. I've thought of it long before.

TRUMP: But the Bastille Day parade was — now that was a super-duper — O.K. I mean, that was very much more than normal. They must have had 200 planes over our heads. Normally you have the planes and that's it, like the Super Bowl parade. And everyone goes crazy, and that's it. That happened for — and you know what else that was nice? It was limited. You know, it was two hours,

and the parade ended. It didn't go a whole day. They didn't go crazy. You don't want to leave, but you have to. Or you want to leave, really.

These things are going on all day. It was a two-hour parade. They had so many different zones. Maybe 100,000 different uniforms, different divisions, different bands. Then we had the retired, the older, the ones who were badly injured. The whole thing, it was an incredible thing.

HABERMAN: It was beautiful.

TRUMP: And you are looking at the Arc [de Triomphe]. So we are standing in the most beautiful buildings, and we are looking down the road, and like three miles in, and then you had the Arc. And then you have these soldiers. Everyone was so proud. Honestly, it was a beautiful thing. I was glad I did it.

People were surprised because I'd just come back from Hamburg. So I was back for three days, and then I had to go out again. But when he [Mr. Macron] invited me, he and I have a very good relationship. I have a very good relationship with Merkel [Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany]. Do you know what happened with Merkel? So I am sitting in the chair. We'd been sitting there for two hours. So it's not like, "Nice to see ya." So the press comes in. So I guess someone screamed out, "Shake her hand, shake her hand!" I didn't even hear. So I didn't shake her hand, because I'd been with her for so long. I'd been with her for a long period of time. So I didn't shake her — the next day, "Trump refused to shake..." [garbled]

TRUMP: She actually called me, and she said, um, "You know, I think we get along very well." I said we do, we really do. I said, "You gotta put more money into NATO," No. 1. And No. 2 is like, our trade imbalance is ridiculous. You know, it's a money machine.

TRUMP: It's been a long time. Nothing changes. Wait till you see what we're going to do on trade.

HABERMAN: Sounds like it's going to be very interesting.

TRUMP: Much more interesting than anybody would understand.

HABERMAN: O.K.

BAKER: Will you go to Britain? Are you going to make a state visit to Britain? Are you going to be able to do that?

TRUMP: As to Britain?

BAKER: Yeah.

HABERMAN: Will you go there?

[crosstalk]

TRUMP: Ah, they've asked me. What was interesting — so, when Macron asked, I said: "Do you think it's a good thing for me to go to Paris? I just ended the Paris Accord last week. Is this a good thing?" He said, "They love you in France." I said, "O.K., I just don't want to hurt you."

TRUMP: We had dinner at the Eiffel Tower, and the bottom of the Eiffel Tower looked like they could have never had a bigger celebration ever in the history of the Eiffel Tower. I mean, there were thousands and thousands of people, 'cause they heard we were having dinner.

[crosstalk/garbled]

HABERMAN: You must have been so tired at, by that point.

TRUMP: Yeah. It was beautiful. We toured the museum, we went to Napoleon's tomb ...

[crosstalk]

TRUMP: Well, Napoleon finished a little bit bad. But I asked that. So I asked the president, so what about Napoleon? He said: "No, no, no. What he did was incredible. He designed Paris." [garbled] The street grid, the way they work, you know, the spokes. He did so many things even beyond. And his one problem is he

didn't go to Russia that night because he had extracurricular activities, and they froze to death. How many times has Russia been saved by the weather? [garbled]

[crosstalk/unintelligible]

TRUMP: Same thing happened to Hitler. Not for that reason, though. Hitler wanted to consolidate. He was all set to walk in. But he wanted to consolidate, and it went and dropped to 35 degrees below zero, and that was the end of that army.

[crosstalk]

But the Russians have great fighters in the cold. They use the cold to their advantage. I mean, they've won five wars where the armies that went against them froze to death. [crosstalk] It's pretty amazing.

So, we're having a good time. The economy is doing great.

SCHMIDT: The markets are doing great.

TRUMP: They're going to really go up if we do what we're doing. I mean, cut regulations tremendously. Sometimes — you know, one thing they hadn't thought about at The Times, where they said I didn't really cut regulations as much. I heard that because I said — it could have been a little slip-up in terms of what I said — I meant, for the time in office, five months and couple of weeks, I think I've done more than anyone else. They may have taken it as more than anyone else, period.

[crosstalk]

But I'm talking about for my time. I heard that Harry Truman was first, and then we beat him. These are approved by Congress. These are not just executive orders. On the executive orders, we cut regulations tremendously. By the way, I want regulations, but, you know, some of the — you have to get nine different regulations, and you could never do anything. I've given the farmers back their farms. I've given the builders back their land to build houses and to build other things.

The energy stuff is going really well. We're going to be an exporter — we already are an exporter of energy. We're doing well. I mean, the banks, you look

at rules and regulations, you look at Dodd-Frank, Dodd-Frank is going to be, you know, modified, and again, I want rules and regulations. But you don't want to choke, right? People can't get loans to buy a pizza parlor, to buy a — you know, I saw out on the trail — people say, Mr. Trump, we've dealt with banks, my own bank, and they can't loan me anymore. I've never had a bad day with a bank. You know? So we'll put — yeah, because of statutory [garbled], they can't loan to that kind of a business. And they're good businesses to loan to. So I think we've — I think we're set to really go [garbled].

BAKER: As long as we're on the record, a lot of people are curious about your conversation with President [Vladimir V.] Putin at dinner. Not surprising. But what did you all talk about, and—

TRUMP: So, that dinner was a very long time planned dinner. And what it was was an evening at the opera. It was a final night goodbye from Germany and from Chancellor Merkel. It was her dinner. It was, you know, everybody knew about it. It was well-known.

TRUMP: So when we got there, it was with spouses, and when we got there, there were a thousand media. You guys know, were you guys there?

BAKER: No, it was Julie [Hirschfeld Davis] and Glenn Thrush.

TRUMP: So, it was tremendous media. And we took a picture of everybody, the wives and the leaders, and then the leaders, and, you know, numerous pictures outside on the river. Then everybody walked in to see the opera. Then the opera ended. Then we walked into a big room where they had dinner for not only the leaders — Lagarde [Christine Lagarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund] was there, who I think is terrific, and various others. You had the E.U. people there, people other than just the leaders, but quite a few people. I would say you have 20 times two, so you had 40, and then you probably had another 10 or 15 people, you had Christine Lagarde, you had some others also.

So, I was seated next to the wife of Prime Minister Abe [Shinzo Abe of Japan], who I think is a terrific guy, and she's a terrific woman, but doesn't speak

English.

HABERMAN: Like, nothing, right? Like zero?

TRUMP: Like, not "hello."

HABERMAN: That must make for an awkward seating.

TRUMP: Well, it's hard, because you know, you're sitting there for—

HABERMAN: Hours.

TRUMP: So the dinner was probably an hour and 45 minutes.

TRUMP: You had an opera, and then you had a cocktail party for the people at the opera, and then you had the leaders with the spouses, and other leaders in Europe and maybe other places, go in. We sat at this really long table, which held, has to be at least 60, 65 people with room. O.K., it's a very big table, big room. But there was nothing secretive about it.

It was like, that's where we're going. And I think it even said on the list, at the request of the German chancellor and Germany, it's going to be the opera, it's going to be cocktails, it's going to be dinner. I think the crowd thinned out for the dinner — you know, it was the leaders, primarily. But the leaders and Lagarde. And [inaudible].

O.K., so we're sitting at this massive table. And the wives are separated from their husbands, which sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. But they did. It's always easier when they don't do it, because you always have somebody to talk to, right? And I was sitting next to the president of Argentina — his wife — [Mauricio] Macri — nice woman, who speaks English. And the prime minister of Japan's wife, Prime Minister Abe. Great relationships. So I'm sitting there. There was one interpreter for Japanese, 'cause otherwise it would have been even tougher. But I enjoyed the evening with her, and she's really a lovely woman, and I enjoyed — the whole thing was good.

And now Melania was sitting on the other side of the table, way down on the other end, very far away. She was sitting next to Putin and somebody else, I don't

know. She was sitting next to Putin.

HABERMAN: She had been the whole time?

TRUMP: Yes. She was sitting next to Putin.

BAKER: Does she speak Russian at all?

TRUMP: No. She speaks other languages.

TRUMP: She was sitting next to Putin and somebody else, and that's the way it is. So the meal was going, and toward dessert I went down just to say hello to Melania, and while I was there I said hello to Putin. Really, pleasantries more than anything else. It was not a long conversation, but it was, you know, could be 15 minutes. Just talked about — things. Actually, it was very interesting, we talked about adoption.

HABERMAN: You did?

TRUMP: We talked about Russian adoption. Yeah. I always found that interesting. Because, you know, he ended that years ago. And I actually talked about Russian adoption with him, which is interesting because it was a part of the conversation that Don [Jr., Mr. Trump's son] had in that meeting. As I've said — most other people, you know, when they call up and say, "By the way, we have information on your opponent," I think most politicians — I was just with a lot of people, they said [inaudible], "Who wouldn't have taken a meeting like that?" They just said —

HABERMAN: The senators downstairs?

TRUMP: A lot of them. They said, "Who wouldn't have taken a meeting like that?"

BAKER: You asked them about it at lunch?

TRUMP: Nah, a couple of them. They — now, that was before Russia was hot, don't forget. You know, Russia wasn't hot then. That was almost a year and a half ago. It wasn't like it is, like it is radioactive, then. Russia was Russia.

HABERMAN: Then can I ask you —

BAKER: Sorry to interrupt. The email, though, said something I thought was really interesting, and I wonder what you thought of it. It said this “is part of Russia and its government’s support of Mr. Trump.” So whatever actually happened at the meeting—

TRUMP: Well, I never saw the email. I never saw the email until, you know

BAKER: Right, but now you have. So, what do you interpret that to mean, now that you have seen it?

TRUMP: Well, Hillary did the reset. Somebody was saying today, and then I read, where Hillary Clinton was dying to get back with Russia. Her husband made a speech, got half a million bucks while she was secretary of state. She did the uranium deal, which is a horrible thing, while she was secretary of state, and got a lot of money.

TRUMP: She was opposing sanctions. She was totally opposed to any sanctions for Russia.

BAKER: When was that?

HABERMAN: Do you remember when that was? I don’t remember that.

TRUMP: I just saw it. I just saw it. She was opposed to sanctions, strongly opposed to sanctions on Russia.

HABERMAN: This is post-Crimea, I’m assuming? Is that what we would be talking about?

TRUMP: I don’t really know. ... But in that time. And don’t forget, Crimea was given away during Obama. Not during Trump. In fact, I was on one of the shows, I said they’re exactly right, they didn’t have it as it exactly. But he was — this — Crimea was gone during the Obama administration, and he gave, he allowed it to get away. You know, he can talk tough all he wants, in the meantime

he talked tough to North Korea. And he didn't actually. He didn't talk tough to North Korea. You know, we have a big problem with North Korea. Big. Big, big. You look at all of the things, you look at the line in the sand. The red line in the sand in Syria. He didn't do the shot. I did the shot. Had he done that shot, he wouldn't have had — had he done something dramatic, because if you remember, they had a tremendous gas attack after he made that statement. Much bigger than the one they had with me.

HABERMAN: It was sarin as well?

TRUMP: Sarin. And, and tremendous numbers of people were killed, young people, children. And he didn't do anything. That was a famous weekend where they were all asking him to do it, do it, do it. They thought they had it, and then he — not easy to do, I will say this, 'cause when I had to make that decision, I was with the president of China, and General Mattis [Defense Secretary Jim Mattis] said, "We're locked and loaded, sir," and I'm saying [mumbles], you know. [mumbles] Look, you're killing people.

HABERMAN: Yes.

TRUMP: You hate it, it's tough. Obama — you know, I can understand it in a way, but some things you have to do. But it's, it's a tough, it's a tough decision to make.

BAKER: I do want to come out, on the email, now that you have seen that email that said Russia's government — I mean, how did you — did you interpret it that way?

TRUMP: Well, I thought originally it might have had to do something with the payment by Russia of the D.N.C. Somewhere I heard that. Like, it was an illegal act done by the D.N.C., or the Democrats. That's what I had heard. Now, I don't know where I heard it, but I had heard that it had to do something with illegal acts with respect to the D.N.C. Now, you know, when you look at the kind of stuff that came out, that was, that was some pretty horrific things came out of that. But that's what I had heard. But I don't know what it means. All I know is this: When somebody calls up and they say, "We have infor—" Look what they did to me with Russia, and it was totally phony stuff.

HABERMAN: Which, which one?

SCHMIDT: The dossier.

TRUMP: The dossier.

HABERMAN: The dossier. Oh, yes.

TRUMP: Now, that was totally made-up stuff, and in fact, that guy's being sued by somebody. ... And he's dying with the lawsuit. I know a lot about those guys, they're phony guys. They make up whatever they want. Just not my thing — plus, I have witnesses, because I went there with a group of people. You know, I went there with Phil Ruffin —

HABERMAN: Oh, I didn't know that.

TRUMP: I had a group of bodyguards, including Keith [Schiller] —

HABERMAN: Keith was there, right?

TRUMP: Keith was there. He said, "What kind of crap is this?" I went there for one day for the Miss Universe contest, I turned around, I went back. It was so disgraceful. It was so disgraceful.

TRUMP: When he [James B. Comey] brought it [the dossier] to me, I said this is really made-up junk. I didn't think about anything. I just thought about, man, this is such a phony deal.

HABERMAN: You said that to him?

TRUMP: Yeah, don't forget —

TRUMP: I said, this is — honestly, it was so wrong, and they didn't know I was just there for a very short period of time. It was so wrong, and I was with groups of people. It was so wrong that I really didn't, I didn't think about motive. I didn't know what to think other than, this is really phony stuff.

SCHMIDT: Why do you think — why do you think he shared it?

TRUMP: I think he shared it so that I would — because the other three people left, and he showed it to me.

TRUMP: So anyway, in my opinion, he shared it so that I would think he had it out there.

SCHMIDT: As leverage?

TRUMP: Yeah, I think so. In retrospect. You know, when he wrote me the letter, he said, "You have every right to fire me," blah blah blah. Right? He said, "You have every right to fire me." I said, that's a very strange — you know, over the years, I've hired a lot of people, I've fired a lot of people. Nobody has ever written me a letter back that you have every right to fire me.

[crosstalk]

BAKER: Do you think in hindsight, because of what's happened since then

TRUMP: Comey wrote a letter.

HABERMAN: Which letter?

SCHMIDT: To you? To the F.B.I. staff or to you?

TRUMP: I thought it was to me, right?

BAKER: I think he wrote it to the staff, saying—

TRUMP: It might have been—

BAKER: That "the president has every right to fire me."

TRUMP: It might have been. It was just a very strange letter to say that.

BAKER: But do you think in hindsight, given that—

TRUMP: What was the purpose in repeating that?

BAKER: Do you think what's given that—

TRUMP: Do you understand what I mean? Why would somebody say, "He has every right to fire me," bah bah bah. Why wouldn't you just say, "Hey, I've retired ..."

[crosstalk]

TRUMP: It was very — a lot of people have commented that.

BAKER: Given what's happened since then, though, was it a political mistake to have fired him, given what's happened?

TRUMP: I think I did a great thing for the American people.

SCHMIDT: But look at the headache it's caused, you know?

TRUMP: It's okay. I have headaches, that's what I have, I have headaches. ... But you know what, I think I did a great thing for the American people.

HABERMAN: Do you wish you had done it on Day 1? When you got in? Because I honestly had assumed that you, if you were going to do it, that's when you would do it.

TRUMP: Well, it could've been. It could've been. I feel like it was very dishonest when he wouldn't say what he knew he said to the public. I thought that was very honest. And I thought that he did that for the reason I just said.

SCHMIDT: What do you understand to be the four corners of what Mueller [Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel in the Russia investigation] can look at, if he steps— [crosstalk]

TRUMP: I don't know. Nobody has contacted me about anything.

TRUMP: Because I have done nothing wrong. A special counsel should never have been appointed in this case.

BAKER: Can we put that on the record?

TRUMP: Because so far, the only — yeah, you can put it down.

SCHMIDT: Was that [Attorney General Jeff] Sessions's mistake or [Deputy Attorney General Rod J.] Rosenstein's mistake?

TRUMP: Look, Sessions gets the job. Right after he gets the job, he recuses himself.

BAKER: Was that a mistake?

TRUMP: Well, Sessions should have never recused himself, and if he was going to recuse himself, he should have told me before he took the job, and I would have picked somebody else.

HABERMAN: He gave you no heads up at all, in any sense?

TRUMP: Zero. So Jeff Sessions takes the job, gets into the job, recuses himself. I then have — which, frankly, I think is very unfair to the president. How do you take a job and then recuse yourself? If he would have recused himself before the job, I would have said, "Thanks, Jeff, but I can't, you know, I'm not going to take you." It's extremely unfair, and that's a mild word, to the president. So he recuses himself. I then end up with a second man, who's a deputy.

HABERMAN: Rosenstein.

TRUMP: Who is he? And Jeff hardly knew. He's from Baltimore.

TRUMP: Yeah, what Jeff Sessions did was he recused himself right after, right after he became attorney general. And I said, "Why didn't you tell me this before?" I would have — then I said, "Who's your deputy?" So his deputy he hardly knew, and that's Rosenstein, Rod Rosenstein, who is from Baltimore. There are very few Republicans in Baltimore, if any. So, he's from Baltimore. Now, he, we went through a lot of things. We were interviewing replacements at the F.B.I. Did you know Mueller was one of the people that was being interviewed?

HABERMAN: I did, actually.

TRUMP: He was sitting in that chair. We had a wonderful meeting.

HABERMAN: Day before, right?

SCHMIDT: Did he want the job?

TRUMP: The day before! Of course, he was up here, and he wanted the job.

HABERMAN: And he made that clear to you? He would have—

TRUMP: So, now what happens is, he leaves the office. Rosenstein leaves the office. The next day, he is appointed special counsel. I said, what the hell is this all about? Talk about conflicts? But he was interviewing for the job. There were many other conflicts that I haven't said, but I will at some point. So Jeff Sessions, Jeff Sessions gave some bad answers.

HABERMAN: You mean at the hearing?

TRUMP: Yeah, he gave some answers that were simple questions and should have been simple answers, but they weren't. He then becomes attorney general, and he then announces he's going to recuse himself. Why wouldn't he have told me that before?

HABERMAN: Why do you think it was? What do you think it was?

TRUMP: I don't know.

BAKER: What would cause you — what would be the line beyond which if Mueller went, you would say, "That's too far, we would need to dismiss him"?

TRUMP: Look, there are so many conflicts that everybody has. Then Rosenstein becomes extremely angry because of Comey's Wednesday press conference, where he said that he would do the same thing he did a year ago with Hillary Clinton, and Rosenstein became extremely angry at that because, as a prosecutor, he knows that Comey did the wrong thing. Totally wrong thing. And he gives me a letter, O.K., he gives me a letter about Comey. And by the way, that was a tough letter, O.K. Now, perhaps I would have fired Comey anyway, and it

certainly didn't hurt to have the letter, O.K. But he gives me a very strong letter, and now he's involved in the case. Well, that's a conflict of interest. Do you know how many conflicts of interests there are? But then, then Comey also says that he did something in order to get the special prose—special counsel. He leaked. The reason he leaked. So, he illegally leaked.

TRUMP: So think of this. Mike. He illegally leaks, and everyone thinks it is illegal, and by the way, it looks like it's classified and all that stuff. So he got — not a smart guy — he got tricked into that, because they didn't even ask him that question. They asked him another question, O.K.?

TRUMP: He said I said "hope" — "I hope you can treat Flynn good" or something like that. I didn't say anything.

But even if he did — like I said at the news conference on the, you know, Rose Garden — even if I did, that's not — other people go a step further. I could have ended that whole thing just by saying — they say it can't be obstruction because you can say: "It's ended. It's over. Period."

TRUMP: And nothing was changed other than Richard Nixon came along. And when Nixon came along [inaudible] was pretty brutal, and out of courtesy, the F.B.I. started reporting to the Department of Justice. But there was nothing official, there was nothing from Congress. There was nothing — anything. But the F.B.I. person really reports directly to the president of the United States, which is interesting. You know, which is interesting. And I think we're going to have a great new F.B.I. director.

HABERMAN: Chris Wray.

TRUMP: He's highly thought of by everybody. I think I did the country a great service with respect to Comey.

BAKER: Did you shoo other people out of the room when you talked to Comey?

TRUMP: No, no.

BAKER: That time [inaudible] [Michael T.] Flynn —

TRUMP: No. That was the other thing. I told people to get out of the room. Why would I do that?

SCHMIDT: Did you actually have a one-on-one with Comey then?

TRUMP: Not much. Not even that I remember. He was sitting, and I don't remember even talking to him about any of this stuff. He said I asked people to go. Look, you look at his testimony. His testimony is loaded up with lies, O.K.? But people didn't — we had a couple people that said — Hi baby, how are you?

ARABELLA KUSHNER: [enters room] Hi, Grandpa.

TRUMP: My granddaughter Arabella, who speaks — say hello to them in Chinese.

KUSHNER: Ni hao.

[laughter]

TRUMP: This is Ivanka. You know Ivanka.

IVANKA TRUMP: [from doorway] Hi, how are you? See you later, just wanted to come say hi.

TRUMP: She's great. She speaks fluent Chinese. She's amazing.

BAKER: That's very impressive.

TRUMP: She spoke with President Xi [Jinping of China]. Honey? Can you say a few words in Chinese? Say, like, "I love you, Grandpa" —

KUSHNER: Wo ai ni, Grandpa.

BAKER: That's great.

TRUMP: She's unbelievable, huh?

[crosstalk]

TRUMP: Good, smart genes.

[laughter]

TRUMP: So the bottom line is this. The country's doing well. We are, we are moving forward with a lot of great things. The unemployment is the lowest it's been in 16 years. The stock market is the highest it's ever been. It's up almost 20 percent since I took office. And we're working hard on health care. Um, the Russian investigation — it's not an investigation, it's not on me — you know, they're looking at a lot of things.

HABERMAN: It's a broad —

TRUMP: They're looking at a big picture.

BAKER: This is why I want to come back to that email, because — does it concern you? Let's say that the election didn't change because of anything Russia did, which has been your point, right? You point —

TRUMP: By the way, it's everybody.

BAKER: Right, your point is that Democrats are trying to use this as an excuse, fine. But did that email concern you, that the Russian government was trying something to compromise—

TRUMP: You know, Peter, I didn't look into it very closely, to be honest with you.

BAKER: O.K.

TRUMP: I just heard there was an email requesting a meeting or something — yeah, requesting a meeting. That they have information on Hillary Clinton, and I said — I mean, this was standard political stuff.

SCHMIDT: Did you know at the time that they had the meeting?

TRUMP: No, I didn't know anything about the meeting.

SCHMIDT: But you didn't—

TRUMP: It must have been a very important — must have been a very unimportant meeting, because I never even heard about it.

HABERMAN: No one told you a word, nothing? I know we talked about this on the plane a little bit.

TRUMP: No, nobody told me. I didn't know noth— It's a very unimportant — sounded like a very unimportant meeting.

BAKER: But on the date you clinched the nominations with New Jersey and California and the primaries, when you give the speech that night, saying you're going to give a speech about Hillary Clinton's corrupt dealings with Russia and other countries, and that comes just three hours after Don Jr. —

TRUMP: Number one, remember, I made many of those speeches.

BAKER: People wondered about the timing.

TRUMP: Many of those speeches. I'd go after her all the time.

BAKER: Yeah, I know, but—

TRUMP: But there was something about the book, "Clinton Cash," came out.

BAKER: Yeah, a year earlier, though. But you were talking about—

TRUMP: But we were developing a whole thing. There was something about "Clinton Cash."

TRUMP: Peter, that's all I did, was make those speeches about her. ... I don't think I added anything much different than I had been doing. ... I've made some very strong speeches about the corrupt emails. The 33,000 emails being deleted and bleached, and all of the things she was doing. I would make those speeches routinely. ... There wasn't much I could say about Hillary Clinton that was worse than what I was already saying.

HABERMAN: [laughs] I'm sorry.

TRUMP: I mean, I was talking about, she deleted and bleached, which nobody does because of the cost. How she got away with that one, I have no idea. 33,000 emails. I talked about the back of the plane, I talked about the uranium deal, I talked about the speech that Russia gave Clinton — \$500,000 while she was secretary of state — the husband. I talked about the back of the plane — honestly, Peter, I mean, unless somebody said that she shot somebody in the back, there wasn't much I could add to my repertoire.

HABERMAN: On Fifth Avenue—

TRUMP: I mean, look at what we have now. We have a director of the F.B.I., acting, who received \$700,000, whose wife received \$700,000 from, essentially, Hillary Clinton. 'Cause it was through Terry. Which is Hillary Clinton.

HABERMAN: This is [Andrew] McCabe's wife, you mean?

TRUMP: McCabe's wife. She got \$700,000, and he's at the F.B.I. I mean, how do you think that? But when you say that — and think about this for a second. I don't think — you could give me a whole string of new information. I don't think I could really have — there's only so much. You know, you can only say many things. After that it gets boring, O.K.? How can it be better than deleting emails after you get a subpoena from the United States Congress? Guys go to jail for that, when they delete an email from a civil case. Here, she gets an email from the United States Congress —

BAKER: Should she be prosecuted now?

TRUMP: What?

BAKER: Should she be prosecuted now? Why, then, should she not be prosecuted now—

TRUMP: I don't want to say that. I mean, I don't want to say.

SCHMIDT: Last thing.

TRUMP: You understand what I mean, Peter.

BAKER: I know.

TRUMP: I mean, supposing they were able to give me additional — it wouldn't have helped me. I had so much stuff—

SCHMIDT: Last thing, if Mueller—

TRUMP: And I couldn't have been better than the stuff I had. Obviously, because I won.

SCHMIDT: Last thing, if Mueller was looking at your finances and your family finances, unrelated to Russia — is that a red line?

HABERMAN: Would that be a breach of what his actual charge is?

TRUMP: I would say yeah. I would say yes. By the way, I would say, I don't — I don't — I mean, it's possible there's a condo or something, so, you know, I sell a lot of condo units, and somebody from Russia buys a condo, who knows? I don't make money from Russia. In fact, I put out a letter saying that I don't make — from one of the most highly respected law firms, accounting firms. I don't have buildings in Russia. They said I own buildings in Russia. I don't. They said I made money from Russia. I don't. It's not my thing. I don't, I don't do that. Over the years, I've looked at maybe doing a deal in Russia, but I never did one. Other than I held the Miss Universe pageant there eight, nine years [crosstalk].

SCHMIDT: But if he was outside that lane, would that mean he'd have to go?

[crosstalk]

HABERMAN: Would you consider—

TRUMP: No, I think that's a violation. Look, this is about Russia. So I think if he wants to go, my finances are extremely good, my company is an unbelievably successful company. And actually, when I do my filings, peoples say, "Man." People have no idea how successful this is. It's a great company. But I don't even think about the company anymore. I think about this. 'Cause one thing, when you do this, companies seem very trivial. O.K.? I really mean that. They seem very trivial. But I have no income from Russia. I don't do business with Russia. The gentleman that you mentioned, with his son, two nice people. But basically, they brought the Miss Universe pageant to Russia to open up, you know, one of their jobs. Perhaps the convention center where it was held. It was a nice evening, and I left. I left, you know, I left Moscow. It wasn't Moscow, it was outside of Moscow.

HABERMAN: Would you fire Mueller if he went outside of certain parameters of what his charge is? [crosstalk]

SCHMIDT: What would you do?

[crosstalk]

TRUMP: I can't, I can't answer that question because I don't think it's going to happen.

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