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POLITICS

I Interviewed Trump For 5 Hours. Here's What He Told Me About 'Stupid F—er' McConnell, McCarthy's Bromance With Luntz, And The Fake News That Bothered Him The Most

In multiple interviews, Former President Donald Trump unloads on the rigged 2020 election, Republicans who screwed him, and why he regrets elevating Anthony Fauci during the pandemic.

What follows is adapted from three interviews of President Donald Trump for Mollie Hemingway's latest book "[Rigged: How The Media, Big Tech, and the Democrats Seized Our Elections](#)," out October 12.

"I don't like her ... and I don't like me."

Former President Donald Trump was looking at a photo of the two of us that his assistant had just taken on my phone. It wasn't up to his specifications. We'd just completed the second of three interviews I'd have with him for my new book, "[Rigged: How the Media, Big Tech, and the Democrats Seized Our Elections](#)."

As we walked outside one of the buildings at Mar-a-Lago, his palatial home on 20 acres of Palm Beach Island, Florida, he bragged that he had the only property on the island

that faced both the ocean and the lake, thus the name. “That’s what Mar-a-Lago means – ocean to lake,” he translated, more or less.

Given the setting on the beautiful late March date, I asked if I could take a picture of him. I’d interviewed him a few times in the Oval Office and once already in Florida, but had never taken his picture. He suggested we take one together.

He didn’t like the first photo. “I don’t like her ... and I don’t like me,” he said, suggesting we move to a different location out of the sun. His capable aide Margo Martin took another photo and turned it around to show him. “I like me, but I still don’t like her,” he said.

Trump dropped everything and decided to teach me how to take a picture. Somehow I’d reached my 40s without knowing how.

He walked us to an impeccably manicured, grassy area in front of the historic main building, explaining that you should always think about the background of a photo and not just the people in it. A massive flag flying at half-mast, in remembrance of victims of a shooting in Colorado, was behind us. The flag had also been lowered when I was there a month prior, in honor of Palm Beach’s Rush Limbaugh, who had then recently died. Trump had bestowed a Presidential Medal of Freedom on the conservative icon the year prior.

He told me to angle my body, put my hand on my hip, and a few other tricks. “You can trust me: my wife is a supermodel,” he said, as if I were unaware. Margo showed him the resulting picture.

He looked at it, paused briefly, and said, “Well there you go,” clearly pleased with the result. He was right, it looked much better.

The interview had been all over the place. Trump is a bizarre combination of an open book and difficult to nail down. When my husband listened to tapes of the interviews, he seemed almost shell-shocked at how much Trump hopped around from one topic to the next.

While I like to think I’m an excellent listener, I’m not a fan of the interview style that requires badgering a source for a preferred outcome. As in the other interviews I had

with him, I was just as curious about what he wanted to focus on as what I needed to find out from him.

At one point, he noticed a large bandage on my forearm, which covered a burn I received while cooking dinner for my children. “Did you have a tattoo put on?” he asked, in the midst of listing off detailed election irregularities in Pennsylvania and Michigan. “Mollie’s going into the tattoo stuff? Whoa, that’s a big step.”

As we sat down in his second-floor office, the former president was watching Fox News, where I’m a contributor. He asked me what I thought of various Fox personalities. When he got to Bret Baier, who hosts “Special Report,” I complimented him.

Trump went on a riff about what a good golfer Bret is. “He’s a bull. He’s strong as hell.” Trump had recently played with Bryson DeChambeau, and talked about how he drove the 18th green at his Palm Beach course, which is about a 370-yard carry — even longer than Bret could, he said.

President Joe Biden had held his first press conference earlier that day, more than two months after he’d been inaugurated. Even with **obsequious questions from an adoring press corps**, he’d struggled to complete answers, getting lost and referring to his notes.

“He looks fragile up there. He’s not a long-ball hitter. I can tell you that. He does not hit the long ball,” Trump said. “It’s hard to watch. I mean, to be honest with you, it’s hard to watch. You’re on pins and needles. ‘Cause you just don’t know. When does the blow-up occur? He’s not the sharpest guy.”

Trump was much less troubled by the disparate treatment from the press than I was, but he noted how deferential they’d been to Biden a few days prior to our interview when he fell down three times while walking up the stairs to board Air Force One. “How come it wasn’t covered on the evening news?” he asked.

‘It was a little bit different with me,’ he noted dryly.

As for the press conference, “They’re almost apologizing for asking even an easy question. It’s incredible. You didn’t see that too much with me. The apologies, you know, it was a little bit different with me,” he noted dryly. Later, he would say of the corporate press, “It’s just like they’re one amorphous monster. Just horrible. Almost uniformly.”

A few weeks after Biden was inaugurated, I told Trump during a phone call that I was going to write a book about the 2020 election. He invited me to come see him.

That's how I ended up in Florida in late February, for our first interview. The moment you land at the Palm Beach International airport, people joke about having made it to the Free State of Florida, but that's exactly how it feels compared to D.C.

My friend Karol Markowicz, a writer who escaped Brooklyn for an area near Palm Beach just so her children could attend school during the lockdowns, describes the area as “The Hamptons, but colorful and risk-taking. Everyone is rich enough that they don't care what anyone else thinks of them.”

‘Everyone is rich enough that they don't care what anyone else thinks of them.’

Palm Beach in the winter is just perfect. The town is full of beautiful men and women who seem to have the right balance of work and leisure. With the blissfully temperate climate and the gorgeous — and yes, colorful — homes and lawns, I began to fantasize about what life-changing events would have to occur for me to be able to make the move

also.

For our first meeting, we sat in the 60-foot long Mar-a-Lago central room. Built by Post cereal heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post, and meticulously restored and renovated by Donald Trump, the gold-leafed ceiling towers above ornate furnishings and tapestries. A massive window overlooks the expansive lawn in front of the ocean. On the other side, the open doors lead out to the large patio where members of the private club there have dinner each night.

At a later meeting I was told that President Trump preferred a seat with its back to the ocean side, but this day he was in the seat facing the ocean. Behind him, an open door showed a room with video equipment and a large TV, playing Fox News.

Baier was interviewing Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. I would later learn it was the interview in which McConnell told Baier he'd “absolutely” support Trump if he ran again. But Trump was still frustrated with McConnell and how he'd mismanaged the Trump era, calling him a “stupid f-cker.”

Before the meeting, personal aides and staff of the club milled about. Many people let me know that Trump was in a great mood, in that way that clearly showed his mood hadn't

been great when they first arrived at Mar-a-Lago weeks prior.

I was curious about how he viewed his legacy, but he wasn't interested in talking about anything more than two years out. For a guy known for his self-obsession, he was remarkably knowledgeable and focused on midterm elections and how to strengthen the Republican Party. He took me through what he thought was important in various races to ensure victory, noting arcane rules about primaries, conventions, and how they would affect his involvement.

We discussed what went well in the 2020 campaign and what didn't, along with his view that he'd done what was necessary to win in a free and fair fight. "It hurts to lose less than to win and have it taken away," he said. He reminisced about his triumphant 2020 State of the Union Address, given just as he had defeated Democrats' first impeachment effort, where he could boast of a roaring economy, a secure border, and peace breaking out globally. "George Washington, with Abraham Lincoln as his running mate, could not have beaten me. I was up so much."

He reminded me that his 2016 opponent Hillary Clinton had repeatedly said he was "illegitimate," and that the media hadn't criticized her for a second. Instead they worked with her team for three years to push the lie that he'd stolen the election by colluding with Russia. Democrats – and some Republicans – assisted the operation and gave it credence and legitimacy.

'It hurts to lose less than to win and have it taken away.'

The media partisans won Pulitzers for spreading the lie, but moved on when it came out that it was a Democrat setup. Now they were complaining that he'd questioned the integrity of the next election. Throughout our interviews, he'd note how frustrating it was that he had to simultaneously run the country and survive the establishment's onslaughts against him.

He downplayed the importance of Twitter deplatforming him, one of many moves tech oligarchs had made to suppress their political opposition. Again, he was unfazed. "Some people said they didn't enjoy the tweets. Sometimes it got to be a bit much," he admitted, adding that he didn't even enjoy the last six months of tweeting.

As I left, an aide asked me how the interview went and what the terms of the discussion were – off-the-record or on background, perhaps? It was the only interview we were not

speaking with aides present. No terms had been set. She sighed.

As I waited for my Uber to come pick me up at the valet, the club was filling with well-heeled members and guests. A gorgeous Rolls-Royce with suicide doors pulled up. Guests poured out of Bentleys, Lamborghinis, Teslas, and McLarens. Rod Blagojevich stepped inside.

I had come back to Palm Beach in March, still in the midst of my book research. When talking about the 2020 election, Trump liked to talk about fraud, but the truth of what happened was so much worse.

People, including the president, colloquially use the term “fraud” to refer to any type of election rigging, but technically it only refers to actions that affect the election that are not just illegal but committed knowingly. It’s almost impossible to find conclusive evidence of election fraud, particularly after ballots are counted. But that didn’t mean the election had been conducted without widespread interference.

In early February, political reporter and Nancy Pelosi biographer Molly Ball published a Time magazine article detailing how, as she put it, “a well-funded cabal of powerful people, ranging across industries and ideologies, working together behind the scenes to influence perceptions, change rules and laws, steer media coverage and control the flow of information” had rigged the election to secure a Biden victory.

While she was whitewashing what the cabal had done – asserting unconvincingly that it wasn’t rigging but “fortifying” — she revealed that these powerful elites, funded by Facebook billionaire Mark Zuckerberg, had been able to embed left-wing activists into election offices to assist Democrats with their get-out-the-vote efforts and the Democrats’ push for mail-in balloting.

‘They spent four years working on rigging the election.’

Despite her best efforts to make it seem less nefarious than it was, it confirmed Republicans’ worst suspicions that things hadn’t been free or fair. Likewise, Trump was pleased to be vindicated in his view that, well, a “well-funded cabal of powerful people” had in fact rigged the election.

“The only good article I’ve read in Time magazine in a long time — that was actually just a piece of the truth because it was much deeper than that — about how they stole the

election,” he said. “They just couldn’t keep it in. You know what I mean? They just couldn’t keep it in. They had to let it out a little bit,” he said.

My book explains, among other things, how Zuckerberg spent hundreds of millions of dollars targeting Democrat counties in ways that significantly drove up Biden’s margin, enabling his victory. The funds weren’t for campaign spending, mind you, but for a **targeted private takeover of the government administration of election operations.**

“We got them by surprise the first time,” Trump said, explaining why he was allowed to win in 2016 and not in 2020. “And the second time, they spent four years working on rigging the election,” he said. “They were willing to do anything they could, and it started from the day I took office or before I took office. It started from right after the election with the Russia hoax.”

He knew also that the global pandemic had helped Democrats take over the administration of elections. “Well, they used COVID to rig the election. There was nothing I could do. They were using COVID and the Republicans have bad leadership with guys like Mitch McConnell. And they allowed them to give these hundred million ballots out,” he said, referring to widespread mail-in balloting, with all of its known threats to election security.

Despite his hyperbolic and imprecise rhetoric, and in our meetings it was regularly that, Trump understood the big picture problems with the 2020 election better than many of his critics. He knew that many of the changes that had been forced through states in 2020 **were unconstitutional.**

“The constitution of the United States says you cannot change any of your rules, regulations, or anything else, unless you go through the state legislatures,” he said, referring to Article II, Section 1, Clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution, which leaves the power to the state legislature to make the election laws. Pennsylvania had been one of the states that made major changes to election laws, arguably in violation of both the federal and state constitutions.

Trump told me a story about how Sen. Ben Sasse annoyed him right after the 2016 election by being unduly hostile at his initial meeting with the Senate GOP conference. “Terrible senator. This started right at the beginning,” he said, remembering how much time, in his view, the Nebraska senator had spent sniping in the wrong direction. “He’s

actually stupid, 'cause you know the problem with the Republicans is they don't stick together. You don't have Mitt Romney and Ben Sasse in the Democrat Party," he said, while admitting Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.V., occasionally played a minor version of that role in his party.

A few years later, Sens. Lindsey Graham and Ted Cruz asked Trump to give Sasse another chance. "I say, 'Keep him out. Guy's a loser.' So they said, 'No, no, no. He wants to make peace.'" Sasse was trying to avoid a primary challenge at the time. "He was like a little boy. He was so well behaved. He didn't say a word. And they made a case as to why I should let him back into the fold," Trump said.

'The problem with the Republicans is they don't stick together.'

Combined with Sasse's change of behavior to avoid a primary, Trump went on to endorse him. As soon as he won his primary, the old Sasse returned.

"And he made stuff up about, he said terrible things. He made stuff up about Christians, about this, about that, about evangelicals. He made it up," Trump said, although really it was the left-wing publication [The Atlantic](#) that had created the story, using some of their anonymous sources and creative writing, to allege Trump had said monstrous things about key constituencies.

Later, the Atlantic would invent a story about Trump disparaging World War I dead, despite it being refuted by dozens of on-the-record sources and contemporaneous government evidence. Sasse, who claims he opposes conspiracy theories, has [declined to speak against those The Atlantic has published](#), and regurgitated their claims in a call to donors that he had [leaked to a NeverTrump conduit at the Washington Examiner](#) just as tens of millions of Americans were voting by mail in the tight 2020 presidential election:

Republican Sen. Ben Sasse, in a private call with constituents, excoriated President Trump, saying he had mishandled the coronavirus response, 'kisses dictators' butts,' 'sells out our allies,' spends 'like a drunken sailor,' mistreats women, and trash-talks evangelicals behind their backs. Trump has 'flirted with white supremacists,' according to Sasse, and his family 'treated the presidency like a business opportunity.'

It was a classic example of how NeverTrumpers gave aid and comfort to Democrats at crunch time, moves that demoralized Republican voters and suppressed votes for Trump.

“He was on a phone call to his donors that he essentially leaked to the press. Okay. You know, he’s a sleazebag,” he said. Trump knew Sasse was reverting to his old ways shortly after the Nebraskan won his primary, when he viciously criticized Trump for a plan to draw down troop size in Germany.

‘He is a better baseball pitcher than he is predicting what to do with people’s health.’

“I want to bring troops out of Germany. You know, some of them, because we’ve got 54,000 troops in Germany costing us billions of dollars. Germany treats us badly on trade and many other things. And so I’m going to reduce it by 25,000. And I hear Little Ben Sasse is chipping away saying how we shouldn’t do it. You know, he wants to stay in Afghanistan, let soldiers stay there and get their faces blown off, and

their arms blown off for another 19 years and die,” Trump said.

Then Trump regaled me with detailed stories of how various Nebraska Republicans yelled at him for endorsing Sasse when he was somewhat vulnerable. “I said, uh, no kidding,” explaining that he made other similar mistakes in an effort to avoid having too many primary battles.

“So I end up supporting a guy who’s a sleazebag. By the way, you can quote me on all this stuff. A very dishonest guy, because at least go out there and you know, play who you are,” Trump said in our interview. “You’ve got to see him at that meeting. He was like a quiet little boy who just sat there. And they did all the talking on his behalf and you know that he couldn’t have been better. He didn’t say a bad thing about me for two years.”

I peppered Trump about why he had enabled Anthony Fauci, who relished his role in advocating lockdowns and other authoritarian responses to the COVID pandemic. Trump defended him in part, as did so many others I spoke with in the Trump administration. But Trump conceded Fauci had faults.

“Well, who knew that he knew so little? Anthony Fauci is a good promoter—he’s a great promoter. He is a better baseball pitcher than he is predicting what to do with people’s

health,” Trump said, needling him about the wild first pitch he threw at a Major League Baseball game during his 2020 publicity tour.

I asked Trump at a later interview whether he ever got suspicious about what was by that point acknowledged to be a lab leak from the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Trump had been excoriated by the press for suggesting COVID-19 had leaked from the lab, disagreeing with the cover story from China and the World Health Organization that it had been initially spread via a nearby wet market. A year later, many in corporate media begrudgingly acknowledged his suggestion was accurate.

Wasn't it interesting how devastating the virus's impact was globally compared to how it had affected China, I asked. Did he ever wonder if it was intentional?

“No, I never thought China did it on purpose. I thought it was done out of incompetence and I may be wrong because they were the biggest beneficiaries. I felt it came from the lab from day one. I think it was an accident,” he said, rejecting any grander conspiracy theory.

Trump acknowledged his public health messaging about COVID had not been handled well, but he was clearly proud of what he accomplished in the big picture.

‘I never thought China did it on purpose.’

“One of the things that I'm disappointed about is that I think we did a great job with COVID,” said Trump. “With the vaccine, that's such a game-changer and nobody else would have done that. And I did something else. I went out and bought hundreds of thousands of doses before we knew that we had a vaccine. That was a big risk.”

“Nobody's ever treated the FDA the way I did, because this was life and death,” Trump said. “I was really almost bad to them, but I wasn't bad because I'm trying to save lives.”

“I found them to be not incompetent but unbelievably bureaucratic,” he said, noting that in meetings Food and Drug Administration officials would talk about how many years it would take to get treatments and medications approved.

He wondered if Biden had a “senior moment” when he claimed there was no vaccine when he came into office. “He got shot, meaning jabbed, on December 21st, apparently. Now, do you think he didn't know where he was? That was a little scary,” Trump said.

Trump also expressed concern about Pfizer, the drug company that he said “has great power, in my opinion, over the FDA.” He worried that Pfizer’s financial concerns were affecting decisions made at the FDA.

I asked him about reports that the vaccine approval had been inappropriately delayed until after the election. He seemed to agree that it may have happened, but wasn’t too concerned. “I don’t feel badly about that,” he said. “If they would have done it before election, fake news media would have made it a tiny story, so it wouldn’t have had the impact. Because it was after election, the press made it massive.” He figured that was better for everyone.

Fred Barnes once commented about how weird it was to interview Trump, because he’s far more genteel in person than he is in public. Usually politicians kiss babies and are saccharine sweet in public, but revert to their natural state in less public situations. Trump is something different. He’s the same guy on and off stage, but much kinder in smaller groups.

He’s profane, yes, and full of insults. But he even goes off the record to praise individuals, as he did with several frequent objects of his scorn. And he’d go off the record to criticize individuals he praised publicly. He dished excellent gossip, which I’m not at liberty to share. He was even an incisive critic of public officials’ rhetoric, noting Gov. Mario Cuomo’s overuse of language related to stars and suns.

‘I could do without, you know, standing up there for an hour and doing what I do.’

The only time he really ducked answering was when I asked him if he’d had COVID during his first debate, marked by belligerence from everyone on stage: “That’s a very interesting statement. I’ve had other people say that. That was the area of time, right?” Others around the president also ducked the question. Later he would tell me that

Regeneron was a cure, as far as he was concerned. That’s the monoclonal antibody treatment he received when he got hit with COVID.

In between my second and third interview, I also ended up getting COVID. I’ve had worse flus, but the duration of recovery was long, particularly as I was trying to write a complicated book under an incredibly short deadline. Even though I was no longer contagious, the famously germaphobic president actually scooted away from me when I told him.

Of course, relative to much of the left these days, Trump doesn't seem to be nearly the germaphobe he was criticized for being just years ago. Of his COVID experience, he dryly remarked, "That was interesting." Having just gone through it, I understood.

We discussed Kanye West's idiosyncratic run for president in 2020. Democrats, led by Marc Elias, had successfully kept him off the ballot by hook and by crook. In Wisconsin, he was supposedly 14 seconds too late in filing his paperwork. Trump had kind words for West, but said he had "loony tendencies."

Trump thought billionaire former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg would have a stronger run in the Democratic primary, just based on his spending. But he bombed his first debate, when Sen. Elizabeth Warren said she wanted to talk about running against a billionaire who speaks disparagingly of women. Not Trump, she said, but Bloomberg.

"One question, he was taken out. Remember the question? 'And it wasn't Donald Trump.' How do you respond? He's going 'Holy s—! Get me out after the first question.' That was Pocahontas. She took him out. Oh wow. You remember that?" Trump asked.

The night before our May interview, I'd seen Trump address the pro-life Susan B. Anthony List. The next morning, Ted Cruz had given a rousing speech in which he talked frankly about how weird it was that Trump had done so much for the movement. He told a great, self-deprecating story about how he was a young policy advisor on George W. Bush's first presidential campaign and didn't realize that meant he was just supposed to regurgitate talking points from conservative organizations.

There was a tough issue going on related to a regulation that had been enacted by President Bill Clinton on behalf of abortion groups. The campaign pledged to rescind it if elected, but Bush never touched it, not even in his second term. When Cruz opposed Trump in 2016, it was in part because he didn't trust him to enact pro-life regulations. Yet he succeeded beyond anyone's expectations. He said courage was the key ingredient missing from many GOP politicians.

Trump was engaged in front of the crowd of pro-life legislators and supporters the night prior. He seemed like he was having fun. I asked him the next day about his late-in-life conversion to politics.

'What's that all about?' Trump asked, adding he was pretty sure McCarthy isn't gay.

“You know, it’s very interesting. People think I have a good time. I could do without it. I could do without, you know, standing up there for an hour and doing what I do, but I like getting the word out. I think it’s important to get the word out because the press doesn’t put it out,” he said. It was one of several times where he suggested he was engaged in politics because he genuinely cared about the direction of the country.

By our May interview, Trump was still disappointed in McConnell, who he called “a disgrace to the Republican Party. He’s gutless. He should have fought for us on the rigged election. Can you imagine Schumer saying ‘We have to declare Trump the winner to get the country going?’”

“The problem with the Republicans is they don’t know who to fight,” Trump said.

I asked him who he thought might make a better leader for Republicans. He discussed a few names off the record, and said, “Leadership is a very funny thing. Oftentimes you don’t know who’s going to be a good leader until they’re there. It’s like you throw the baby into the water and they turn out to be an Olympic champion, or maybe it won’t work out so well. I’ve watched people that have such capability, and they turn out to be lousy leaders. You never know.”

Right before our May interview, Fox News’ Tucker Carlson had revealed that House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy was close friends with Frank Luntz, an advisor to various left-wing groups, who is regularly, if inexplicably, invited to tell Republican officials what their messaging should be. What’s more, **they had recently become roommates.**

“Uh, that Luntz thing is weird, right? What’s *that* all about?” Trump asked, adding he was pretty sure McCarthy isn’t gay. “I don’t think it’s a romance. I think it’s just, they know each other or something. I can’t imagine. I don’t think — I mean, if you’re thinking it — but it is weird.” He advised against the living arrangement. “You know, we’re past the age of roommates. You don’t do that.”

At our May meeting, Biden hadn’t yet botched the country’s exit from Afghanistan. Trump said he’d really wanted to get out before he left office, but that it took time to secure the safety of Americans and the proper handling of military equipment. If only he’d known that Biden and his generals wouldn’t feel the need to worry about those things at all.

“You know, I think 19 years is enough,” he said at the time of Afghanistan. He said that “getting the f— out of these wars” was vitally important. At all three interviews, Trump talked about how much he hated soldiers losing life or limb, particularly in nation-building wars.

“I greet those parents when their kids come in, in the coffin at Dover, and you’ve never seen anything so sad in your life. People standing there with an easel and a picture of this beautiful boy with a crew cut and he’s all set,” he said, imitating the tight posture of a Marine. “And he comes in a coffin, or he goes alive to Walter Reed without arms and legs. And you know, it’s the saddest thing you’ve ever seen.”

That may have something to do with why he particularly hated The Atlantic’s story, in which editor Jeff Goldberg claimed without evidence to have anonymous sources saying Trump called war dead “suckers” and “losers” and “did not believe it important to honor American war dead.”

While the story had no basis in fact and was refuted by dozens of on-the-record sources, it was widely accepted by corporate media and was even mentioned in a presidential debate.

‘That was the one that angered me the most,’ he said, visibly pained.

“That was the one that angered me the most,” he said, visibly pained. If he’d ever said anything like that in front of members of the military, there would have been a fight, he said. “Think of it. I’m standing there with generals and people in the military. Just from a common-sense standpoint, we’re all smart people,” he said. “If I said that in front of generals, I would say, despite the fact that I’m president of the United States, there would be fisticuffs. You understand that?”

After each interview, President Trump invited me to stay for dinner at the club. I had previously declined, but the night of my final interview I was supposed to have dinner with Karol. I wondered if she’d like to do so at Mar-a-Lago. I was pretty sure she hadn’t voted for Trump, but she wasn’t deranged about it, unlike some of our other acquaintances. I called her and she eventually made her way over. We ended up being the last people seated.

Trump was having dinner with Cruz. They were the center of attention. When they finished their dinner, Trump stood up to walk the Texas senator out. The diners all applauded. As he made his way to our side of the patio, Trump said to Karol and me, "How is everything? Amazing?"

But we hadn't even been served water by that point. He motioned to someone to take care of us.

He made some nice comments about Cruz, before bringing up his 2016 convention speech, in which he excoriated Trump. "The way he got out of that race," he said, laughing. "He's a worse loser than me!"

Swarmed by diners asking for pictures, he finally made his escape.

Our meal turned out to be great. The lump crab and a pasta dish with an exquisite sauce was extremely well prepared and flavorful. We were both a bit surprised, having read disdainful media reports of similar dining experiences.

'The way he got out of that race,' he said, laughing. 'He's a worse loser than me!'

Then again, these same reporters suggested that Mar-a-Lago was gauche. It was a reminder of how extremely negative feelings about the former president colored how the media covered him and anything he touched.

When it came time to pay, our waiter told us the president had picked up the tab.

Karol **immigrated to the United States** from the USSR as a child. And now the former president had bought her dinner.

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