

NYT'S TRUMP INTERVIEW: MONEY FOR NOTHING AND CLICKS FOR FREE

The NYT has an article this morning it purports to be from an interview with the President.

Here's what it says about the Russian investigation:

Addressing a wide range of subjects, Mr. Trump brushed off the investigations that have consumed so much of his presidency, saying that his lawyers have been reassured by the departing deputy attorney general, Rod J. Rosenstein, that the president himself was not a target. "He told the attorneys that I'm not a subject, I'm not a target," Mr. Trump said. But even if that is the case, it remains unknown whether the matter would be referred to the House for possible impeachment hearings.

[snip]

Mr. Trump said he has likewise received reassurances from Mr. Rosenstein, who until Attorney General Jeff Sessions was fired in November was overseeing the Russia investigation by the special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III.

"Rod told me I'm not a target of the investigation," he said at one point, but then later suggested he had not talked with him directly. "The lawyers ask him. They say, 'He's not a target of the investigation.'" Asked if that also covered the separate investigation by federal prosecutors in New York, he said, "I don't know about that."

Neither Mr. Rosenstein nor Mr. Mueller has said whether Mr. Trump is a target,

and the president could not recall when Mr. Rosenstein would have assured him. Mr. Mueller has been known to explore whether the president's actions amounted to obstruction of justice. But since Justice Department policy bars indicting a sitting president, it is unclear whether the term "target" would apply.

Mr. Trump denied having anything to do with Mr. Stone's involvement with WikiLeaks, which during the 2016 campaign posted Democratic emails online that were stolen by Russian intelligence services. He expressed sympathy for Mr. Stone for his arrest at the hands of heavily armed F.B.I. agents.

"I've always liked – I like Roger, he's a character," Mr. Trump said, insisting that the F.B.I. agents charging "a house like they did at six o'clock in the morning. I think that was a very sad thing for this country."

Mr. Trump offered a vague account of his involvement in the proposed Moscow project. Michael D. Cohen, his former personal lawyer, has pleaded guilty to lying to Congress about the project and told the authorities that talks continued into the summer of 2016, even as Mr. Trump was securing the Republican nomination.

Rudolph W. Giuliani, the president's current lawyer, said recently that talks went all the way through the November election, only to later claim that he was mistaken and speaking only hypothetically.

"He was wrong," Mr. Trump said on Thursday. "Rudy has been wrong a little bit. But what has happened is this: I didn't care. That deal was not important. It was essentially a letter of intent or an option."

Asked when in 2016 the last conversation he had about the project was, he said, "I would say it was early to middle of the year. Now, I don't know that Cohen didn't go a little bit longer than that. I don't think it would be much longer." He added: "I was running for president; I was doing really well. The last thing I cared about was building a building." [my emphasis]

Already in that excerpt, NYT gets something that Maggie is obstinately wrong about wrong: not only is Mueller obviously investigating Trump in the conspiracy in chief (which is all Mueller has asked him about), but he is or was investigating him as part of a counterintelligence investigation. The obstruction is the chump change of the investigation, yet the only thing the NYT mentions here.

But NYT posted an excerpted transcript—which takes out both off the record comments, including this one on Roger Stone where Trump goes from suggesting "we'll do something" about Roger Stone being treated very badly and then bridging, in off the record content, to Stone's claim he would never testify against Trump.

HABERMAN: Who else has been treated very badly, in your opinion?

TRUMP: Well, I'd rather save it for later. We'll do something on it at the right time, but I did think this. When Roger Stone, who all of us know, I mean everybody knows Roger.

TRUMP: He was not my consultant. But if you read the papers you know it's like — the media, it's like — but I've always liked him. He's a character, and I'll tell you what people respect what he said. Bearing false witness, etc. But yeah, people do respect what he said.

HABERMAN: What he said about what?

TRUMP: Bear false witness. I will never testify against the president.

It also removes “asides,” which for a verbal logorrhean like Trump are among the most important things he says.

But the other details in the transcript reveal how much the NYT spun what they got. First, as a number of people have noted, Trump corrected himself, repeatedly to make it clear that the only denial he got was about being a target – “target ... target ... target ... target” – not a subject. NYT shouldn’t have included the mention of being a “subject,” at all.

NYT also doesn’t reveal that Maggie herself laid out the timing – “over the course of the last year” – on such reassurances, before complaining that Trump wasn’t more specific about the timing, when in fact he simply blew off the question.

HABERMAN: Has Rod Rosenstein given you any sense over the course of the last year about whether you have any exposure, either in – or there’s any concerns, or whether you’re a target of the Mueller report?

TRUMP: Well he told the attorneys that I’m not a subject, I’m not a target.

HABERMAN: He told your attorneys?

TRUMP: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

[snip]

HABERMAN: Do you remember how long ago he said that?

TRUMP: I think the lawyers would speak to him a lot about that. Not a lot. But a number of times. He never said – I never asked him that question.

HABERMAN: But your lawyers have?

TRUMP: The lawyers ask him. They say, "He's not a target of the investigation."

Then, Maggie gets something subtly wrong about Trump's denials of any ties to Stone's efforts to reach out to WikiLeaks.

HABERMAN: Did you ever tell him to – or other people to get in touch with them?

TRUMP: Never did.

HABERMAN: You saw that was in the indictment.

TRUMP: Can I tell you? I didn't see it.

The indictment doesn't say that Trump directed specific people to get in touch, themselves, with WikiLeaks. Rather, it says that someone "was directed" to contact Stone.

After the July 22, 2016 release of stolen DNC emails by Organization 1, a senior Trump Campaign official was directed to contact STONE about any additional releases and what other damaging information Organization 1 had regarding the Clinton Campaign.

It's a subtle difference, but one important given that we know Stone was using cut-outs himself, and used cut-outs in his phone calls to Trump during the campaign.

Finally, Peter Baker gets Trump to admit something amazing over and over, but it doesn't make the final argument. Trump says the Trump Tower deal was no big deal because he didn't have to put any money up.

BAKER: But you told people that you didn't have any business there. People might have misunderstood.

TRUMP: That wasn't business. Peter, that wasn't business.

BAKER: Isn't that misleading to say you weren't pursuing business there, right?

[Crosstalk]

TRUMP: I had no money invested. It was a letter of intent, or option. It was a free option. It was a nothing. And I wasn't doing anything. I don't consider that even business. And frankly, that wasn't even on my radar. If you take a look at that, take a look at the deal. There was no money put up. There was no transfer. I don't think they had a location. I'm not even sure if they had a location.

[snip]

BAKER: Clearly there was a hope of having money. That was the reason you were pursuing it, right?

TRUMP: My point is this – It was a free option to look at a deal, to look at deals. That was not like, "I'm going to buy a property in Moscow. I'm going to do – or I'm building a building in Moscow." Now, I would have had every right to do a deal. That's what I did. That's what I did.

[snip]

But the way I view it is early in the year to middle of the year, no interest. I had very little interest in the first place, and again, I viewed it as a free option. [my emphasis]

This is the entire point! Trump was being offered \$300 million ... for free. Trump uses that to dismiss the import of the deal with respect to his campaign. But a free \$300 million is a lot closer to a bribe – and therefore even more inexcusable – that an opportunity to shell out real money for a tower.

Finally, this language deserves more attention.

The NYT actually gets a reference Trump makes badly wrong. Trump is not referring to Tony Podesta here. He's referring to John Podesta.

TRUMP: I have nothing. All I did was be a good candidate. Russia didn't help me. Russia did not help me. There was no collusion. There was none of that. I was a good candidate. I did a good job. I won't say whether she was a good candidate or not. I mean, the primary collusion was Hillary Clinton. If you take a look, Peter. I mean, look at that phony dossier. Some of that money, they say, went to Russia. [Tony] Podesta was involved with Russia. [my emphasis]

That was precisely the [Joule Holdings] attack that Stone and Jerome Corsi book-ended their outreach to WikiLeaks over. It seems important to get it correct.

And in such immediate context, the fact that Trump claimed, again, that Russia didn't help him deserves a fact check.

Of course they did. They may not have delivered on that \$300 million "free option," yet. But they certainly helped with the election, including an attack on *John* Podesta that the NYT doesn't even recognize.

As I disclosed last July, I provided information to the FBI on issues related to the Mueller investigation, so I'm going to include disclosure statements on Mueller investigation posts from here on out. I will include the disclosure whether or not the stuff I shared with the FBI pertains to the subject of the post.