

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF THE EPSTEIN BOOK STORY

The WSJ and Donald Trump are telling different versions of the genesis of the story on Trump's birthday letter to Jeffrey Epstein. But both are hiding the timeline of how the story came together.

As Trump's "Statement of Facts" in his frivolous lawsuit claims, Joe Palazzolo sent Karoline Leavitt an email alerting her WSJ was going to publish.

12. On July 15, 2025, Palazzolo sent an email to White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt advising of Dow Jones' intent to publish an article which discussed a purported letter sent by President Trump to Epstein for Epstein's fiftieth birthday.

WSJ says that one or both of them actually interviewed Trump during the evening on July 15 (it doesn't describe the circumstances of the interview), and in that interview the President told [the Journal] he was going to sue.

In an interview with the Journal **on Tuesday evening**, Trump denied writing the letter or drawing the picture. "This is not me. This is a fake thing. It's a fake Wall Street Journal story," he said.

"I never wrote a picture in my life. I don't draw pictures of women," he said. "It's not my language. It's not my words."

He told the Journal he was preparing to file a lawsuit if it published an article. "I'm gonna sue The Wall Street Journal just like I sued everyone else," he said. [my emphasis]

In a Truth Social post published shortly after the story, Trump claimed (using the passive voice) that Murdoch “personally, [was] warned directly by President Donald J. Trump” and that Karoline Leavitt warned Emma Tucker.

The Wall Street Journal, and Rupert Murdoch, personally, were warned directly by President Donald J. Trump that the supposed letter they printed by President Trump to Epstein was a FAKE and, if they print it, they will be sued. Mr. Murdoch stated that he would take care of it but, obviously, did not have the power to do so. The Editor of The Wall Street Journal, Emma Tucker, was told directly by Karoline Leavitt, and by President Trump, that the letter was a FAKE, but Emma Tucker didn’t want to hear that.

None of those conversations appear in the lawsuit (nor is Tucker included in the suit, though CEO Robert Thomson, whom Trump claims was also “put on notice” is). It says that, seemingly in response to in response to Palazzolo’s email and “that same afternoon,” some unnamed counsel (Alejandro Brito, who filed the suit? someone at the White House? he doesn’t say) sent an email warning that the “claim[] that President Trump authored the purported letter ... was false.”

13. **That same afternoon**, counsel for President Trump sent an email to Defendants advising that the intended article was false in claiming that President Trump authored the purported letter, which he did not, and further warned Dow Jones to cease and desist from publishing, disseminating, or otherwise distributing such information, because it was false and defamatory.

14. None of the Defendants responded to the email. [my emphasis]

Trump doesn't quote this email. But the claim the email refutes – that Trump "authored" the email – is not what the story says at all. It says this:

[Ghislaine Maxwell] turned to Epstein's family and friends [for birthday emails]. One of them was Donald Trump.

[snip]

The letter [bears] Trump's name

[snip]

It isn't clear how the letter with Trump's signature was prepared.

A non-existent claim that Trump authored the email is by no means the only thing in the lawsuit Trump makes up.

Mind you, this lawsuit, like the ones against CBS and ABC (the others that Trump boasted about having sued), is only ostensibly about factual claims. It's really about power. As he said in a Truth Social post after filing the lawsuit, this is about "[holding] to account."

We have proudly held to account ABC and George [Stephanopoulos], CBS and 60 Minutes, The Fake Pulitzer Prizes, and many others who deal in, and push, disgusting LIES, and even FRAUD, to the American People.

I have noted that Trump may be less interested in threatening News Corp with regulatory consequences than ABC and CBS; after all, he relies on the dominance of the Fox News bubble. But unless we're misunderstanding this lawsuit (and we may well be), his goal is to force Rupert Murdoch to sit for a deposition or, in Murdoch's attempt attempt to avoid that, to extort millions of dollars as tribute.

But to understand whether that would ever happen, it would help to know some more

background that either side is revealing. Just as one example, was early reporting on this story the reason why Trump so feebly asked “Are you still talking about Jeffrey Epstein” on July 8, a full week before the Tuesday exchanges about the truth of the story.

WSJ takes credit for the panic Trump expressed on July 16 – the day when, we now know, he knew the story was coming but we only knew rumors.

Earlier this week, after the Journal sought comment from the president about the letter, Trump told reporters at the White House that he believed some Epstein files were “made up” by former Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden and former FBI Director James Comey.

He said that releasing any more Epstein files would be up to Attorney General Pam Bondi. “Whatever she thinks is credible, she should release,” Trump said.

But they don’t take credit for the very similar panic Trump expressed on July 12, the first time he attempted to slot the Epstein scandal in next to other things he falsely claims are hoaxes.

15. Instead, on July 17, 2025, Defendants published, or caused the publishing of, the article authored by Defendants Safdar and Palazzolo titled “Jeffrey Epstein’s Friends Sent Him Bawdy Letters for a 50th Birthday Album. One was from Donald Trump” (the “Article”).

Something put Trump entirely off his game before July 8 and it’s not yet clear whether he has resumed it with Tulsi’s conspiracy theories or not.

It’s not clear whether this story spooked him, or this story came about by the circumstances that spooked him a few weeks earlier (though it

is clear that a story like this would take some time to fact check).

It's not even clear whether Trump has a Jeffrey Epstein problem, or a far more pressing Ghislaine Maxwell problem.

Update: Ben Wittes' thoughts about why Trump might be suing mirror my own. But as I said, I think the obvious answers may not be the correct ones.

A second possibility is that the story is true, but that Trump thinks—like Wilde and Hiss did—that it can't be proven true. So he thinks he can use the litigation to intimidate the press and raise doubts about the truth of the allegations. This was a dangerous move for Wilde and Hiss, and it's a dangerous move for Trump too. The discovery process never flatters a man like Trump; there are a lot of people who know things about his relationship with Epstein; and there are undoubtedly other documents out there as well that reflect on it. Creating a formal legal process in which Trump has to provide materials to an opposing litigant and answer questions about those materials is a profoundly risky game.

Possibility number three—which I suspect is the most likely one—is that the story is true and the litigation is just for show. Trump knows he can't afford discovery. He also knows his suit has no merit. So while he gets a news splash out of filing the lawsuit, he will then—as he did with the Des Moines Register poll suit—quietly drop it sometime down the road, before the discovery can actually do him any harm. This way, he gets much of the intimidation benefit of the suit. He costs News Corp. some money. But he doesn't put much at risk.

A final possibility is that Trump hasn't really considered the risks at all; he's just rage-suing. Rage-suing is somewhat like rage-tweeting, except that it involves lawyers. With rage-tweeting, public relations people and policy folks clean up the damage after the fact. In the case of rage-suing, lawyers do so—assuming they can. If this is what's going on here, Trump could dig himself into a real hole. He could get a judge who doesn't look kindly on this sort of thing. He could end up having to turn over a lot of documents. He could end up having to testify under oath, the very thing that got Clinton into trouble.