

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINETEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR OKEECHOBEE COUNTY, FLORIDA
CIVIL DIVISION**

PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP,

Plaintiff,

v.

CASE NO.: _____

MEMBERS OF THE PULITZER PRIZE BOARD, an unincorporated association, ELIZABETH ALEXANDER, ANNE APPLEBAUM, NANCY BARNES, LEE C. BOLLINGER, KATHERINE BOO, NEIL BROWN, NICOLE CARROLL, STEVE COLL, GAIL COLLINS, JOHN DANISZEWSKI, GABRIEL ESCOBAR, CARLOS LOZADA, KELLY LYTLE HERNANDEZ, KEVIN MERIDA, MARJORIE MILLER, VIET THANH NGUYEN, EMILY RAMSHAW, DAVID REMNICK, and TOMMIE SHELBY,

Defendants.

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff, President DONALD J. TRUMP, by and through his undersigned counsel, sues members of THE PULITZER PRIZE BOARD, Defendants, ELIZABETH ALEXANDER, ANNE APPLEBAUM, NANCY BARNES, LEE C. BOLLINGER, KATHERINE BOO, NEIL BROWN, NICOLE CARROLL, STEVE COLL, GAIL COLLINS, JOHN DANISZEWSKI, GABRIEL ESCOBAR, CARLOS LOZADA, KELLY LYTLE HERNANDEZ, KEVIN MERIDA, MARJORIE MILLER, VIET THANH NGUYEN, EMILY RAMSHAW, DAVID REMNICK,, and TOMMIE SHELBY; and alleges as follows:

JURISDICTION, PARTIES AND VENUE

1. This is an action for damages arising out of the defamation of Plaintiff by Defendants.

2. This Court has jurisdiction since the amount in controversy exceeds \$30,000, exclusive of interest, costs, and attorneys' fees.

3. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to § 47.011, Fla. Stat., as the cause of action accrued in Okeechobee County, Florida.

4. Plaintiff, President Donald J. Trump, is a resident of Palm Beach County, Florida.

5. The Pulitzer Prize Board is an unincorporated association responsible for the administration of the Pulitzer Prizes, awarded annually for “distinguished examples” of “material coming from a United States newspaper, magazine, or news site that publishes regularly during the calendar year and adheres to the highest journalistic principles.”¹

6. The below Defendants comprised the Pulitzer Prize Board when the defamatory statement was published in July 2022.

7. Defendant Elizabeth Alexander is a resident of the State of New York and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

8. Defendant Anne Applebaum is a resident of the District of Columbia and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

9. Defendant Nancy Barnes is a resident of the District of Columbia and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

10. Defendant Lee C. Bollinger is a resident of the State of New York and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

¹ *Administration of the Prizes* (available at <https://www.pulitzer.org/page/administration-prizes> (last visited December 12, 2022)).

11. Defendant Katherine Boo is a resident of the State of Maryland and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

12. Defendant Neil Brown is a resident of Pinellas County, Florida, and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

13. Defendant Nicole Carroll is a resident of the State of Virginia and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

14. Defendant Steve Coll is a resident of the State of Pennsylvania and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

15. Defendant Gail Collins is a resident of the State of New York and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

16. Defendant John Daniszewski is a resident of the State of New York and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

17. Defendant Gabriel Escobar is a resident of the State of Virginia and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

18. Defendant Carlos Lozada is a resident of the State of Maryland and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

19. Defendant Kelly Lytle Hernandez is a resident of the State of California and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

20. Defendant Kevin Merida is a resident of the State of California and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

21. Defendant Marjorie Miller is a resident of the State of New York and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association. Defendant Miller is also employed by the Pulitzer Prize Board as its Administrator.

22. Defendant Viet Thanh Nguyen is a resident of the State of California and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

23. Defendant Emily Ramshaw is a resident of the State of Texas and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

24. Defendant David Remnick is a resident of the State of New York and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

25. Defendant Tommie Shelby is a resident of the State of Massachusetts and at all times relevant was a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, an unincorporated association.

26. Defendants, as individual members of an unincorporated association, are the proper defendants in this case. *Larkin v. Buranosky*, 973 So. 2d 1286, 1287 (Fla. 4th DCA 2008).

27. Defendants, as the Pulitzer Prize Board, maintain an internet website, www.pulitzer.org (the "Website").

28. The Pulitzer Prize Board publishes information on the Website regarding the conferral and history of the Pulitzer Prizes, past award recipients' winning entries, instructions for submissions for future prizes, biographical information pertaining to current and past members of the Pulitzer Prize Board, and news relating to the Pulitzer Prizes and the Pulitzer Prize Board.

29. The defamatory publication about Plaintiff, posted on the Website by Defendants as "news," constitutes an electronic communication into Florida for purposes of long-arm jurisdiction over nonresident Defendants. *See* § 48.193(1)(a)(2), Fla. Stat.

30. Defendants are each subject to the personal jurisdiction of this Court as the defamatory statement at issue was (1) published by them on the Website, (2) about a Florida resident, (3) made accessible in Florida, and (4) was actually accessed in Florida. *Internet Sols. Corp. v. Marshall*, 39 So. 3d 1201, 1216 (Fla. 2010).

31. Defendants placed the defamatory statement on the Website, making it instantly available everywhere, including Florida. *Lowery v. McBee*, 322 So. 3d 110 (Fla. 4th DCA 2021).

32. The defamatory publication was accessed by third parties in Okeechobee County, Florida, such that Defendants “published” the defamatory material in Florida for purposes of the Florida long-arm statute.

33. Defendants also have sufficient contacts in Florida to satisfy the broader personal jurisdiction questions of due process, minimum contacts, and traditional notices of fair play and substantial justice.

34. *First*, Defendants purposefully directed their defamatory statement into Florida because it was a direct response to a series of private letters and public statements made by President Trump from Florida inquiring whether Defendants would re-evaluate or rescind the 2018 Pulitzer Prizes for National Reporting for reasons described herein. Because the defamatory statement was Defendants’ direct, public response to Plaintiff in Florida, the defamatory statement was intentionally directed into Florida.

35. *Second*, Defendants’ defamatory statement was also expressly aimed at damaging Plaintiff’s personal, business, and political relationships in Florida and indeed among Florida residents. The brunt of the reputational harm inflicted on Plaintiff’s personal, business, and political relationships caused by Defendants’ publication of the defamatory statement was experienced by Plaintiff in Florida.

36. All conditions precedent to the maintenance of the causes of action alleged herein, if any, have occurred or been performed, excused, or waived.

BACKGROUND AND GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

A. The Rise and Fall of the Russia Collusion Hoax

37. In the early days of May 2016, as his last Republican challengers withdrew from the race, it became apparent Donald J. Trump would be the Republican Party's nominee for president.

38. Faced with this improbable reality, the government and media establishments were forced to address the arrival of a powerful, disruptive political adversary.

39. In response, President Trump's political opponents ginned up an absurdly false and defamatory narrative as a means of damaging then-Candidate Trump: that he and his presidential campaign had somehow made a deal with Vladimir Putin and the Russian government and were conspiring and cooperating with the Russians to manipulate the 2016 Presidential Election in his favor (the "Russia Collusion Hoax").

40. Following years of investigation and incessant, often breathless, media coverage, by July 2022 the Russia Collusion Hoax had been fully and emphatically debunked numerous times.

41. It is now a widely known fact that Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign (the "Clinton Campaign") hired an opposition research firm, Fusion GPS, to manufacture the Russia Collusion Hoax and create the false impression of links between President Trump, his presidential campaign, and the Russian government.

42. At the core of much of the Russia Collusion Hoax was the "Steele Dossier," a thoroughly discredited series of reports fabricated by former British spy Christopher Steele, who had been engaged by Fusion GPS to manufacture the appearance of collusion between the Trump campaign and certain Russian elements and provided to law enforcement.

43. Key to the promulgation of the Russia Collusion Hoax were Steele's and Fusion GPS' relationships with various rouge federal law enforcement officers who, acting under the color of law to conceal the political origins of the false narrative, shielded this political disinformation beneath the façade of a seemingly authentic, but in reality corrupt, investigation known as "Crossfire Hurricane."

44. It has since been revealed that the Crossfire Hurricane investigation relied upon bogus confidential sources (including but not limited to Steele), the unlawful surveillance of American citizens, lies told by federal agents under oath to secret FISA courts, and false reports advanced by a complicit mainstream media. These facets of the investigation remained shrouded, at least for a time, behind the enigmatic national intelligence apparatus and collusive members of the national press.

45. A predominantly anti-Trump mainstream media, led by *The New York Times* (the "Times") and *The Washington Post* (the "Post"), ate the story up. National news coverage widely propagated the Russia Collusion Hoax, eschewing common sense along with traditional journalistic principles like verification, attribution, and independence, to advance the Russia Collusion Hoax and damage President Trump.

46. The American public was irrefutably lied to by the *Times* and the *Post*. The lies were so maliciously fabricated to the point that many actually believed the disgustingly fake narrative that President Trump was a Russian asset. Others remained unpersuaded, naturally suspicious that the "Deep State" elements within the media and government establishments would do anything possible to prevent a peaceful transition of power to President Trump, who had vowed to "drain the swamp" once elected.

47. It was an unprecedented media circus. And although the frenzied reporting on the Russia Collusion Hoax would go on to dominate the political and media landscape for years, much to the chagrin of those hell-bent on preventing President Trump's election the American people made him the 45th President of the United States in 2016.

48. President Trump's election put the bad actors responsible for the Russia Collusion Hoax in survival mode, and the attacks escalated.

49. To these Deep State propagandists, President Trump's election *had to* be seen as illegitimate. Media attacks *had to* expand to members of President Trump's family, transition team, and administration, many of whom were also baselessly and publicly accused of maintaining nefarious connections to the Russian elements and investigated as part of Crossfire Hurricane, all part of the Russia Collusion Hoax.

50. Some, including General Michael Flynn, were forced into resignation before the truth could be uncovered.

51. It is important to stress the intense level of investigation given to the Russia Collusion Hoax and how much energy was spent looking for any shred of evidence to support this now-debunked theory. No stone was left unturned. Tens of millions of taxpayer dollars were spent.

52. These investigations would eventually reveal an unlawful, self-authenticating scheme between partisan opposition research organizations, top levels of law enforcement, and the media.

53. Here is how the scheme worked: partisan elements affiliated with the Clinton Campaign peddled their lies to malefactors within law enforcement who used the manufactured information to establish the appearance of lawful investigatory predicate. These agents then used

the false information as pretext to manipulate the FISA court process by lying about the sources and the information's credibility to secure illegal, secret surveillance of U.S. citizens associated with then-Candidate Trump and further their sham investigation.

54. Once the lies had been laundered through the FISA courts, anonymous sources—usually characterized as “senior officials” or “persons familiar”—provided information about “ongoing investigations” and secret FISA warrants to complicit members of the press, who then spun the information into the broader narrative, giving the story legs and further distancing the lie from its partisan origins.

55. These articles, many originally published beneath the mastheads of the *Times* and the *Post*, soon generated their own hype and were used as false evidence for further investigation. The hoax reverberated through the echo chambers of social media. On one hand, hits, retweets, and likes skyrocketed as the algorithms did their jobs and careers were made for those who played ball. On the other hand, anyone not enthusiastically advancing the narrative was shunned by the mainstream press community and their mob of followers and risked being characterized as a Russian asset themselves. It was a witch hunt of astounding proportion.

56. At its core, the Russia Collusion Hoax was always intended to harass, defame, and delegitimize President Trump and anyone in his circle. And, of course, to demoralize and diminish his political base to reduce his chances for election and, later, a smooth presidential administration.

57. Several months into his term, in May 2017, President Trump rightfully dismissed FBI Director James Comey based on his known involvement in the Crossfire Hurricane investigation.

58. Following Director Comey's firing, members of the Democrat congressional minority, led by chief provocateur Rep. Adam Schiff, called for the appointment of a special counsel to investigate Comey's dismissal.

59. Aided by a complicit media, including the *Times* and the *Post*, Democrats got their wish.

60. In May 2017, former FBI Director Robert Mueller was appointed as Special Counsel.

61. Thereafter, Special Counsel Mueller initiated a twenty-two-month, \$32 million investigation that began with Comey's firing and later expanded to encompass portions of Crossfire Hurricane and the veracity of the overall Russia Collusion Hoax.

62. In April 2019, Special Counsel Mueller published the outcome of his investigation (the "Mueller Report") spanning hundreds of pages and referencing thousands of documents reviewed and scores of individuals interviewed. A redacted form of the Mueller Report was made public.

63. The Mueller Report found no conspiracy or coordination ever existed between Russia and President Trump or the Trump campaign, debunking the Russia Collusion Hoax.

64. The United States Attorney General at the time, William Barr, reviewed the Mueller Report and agreed that it "did not find any evidence that members of the Trump campaign or anyone associated with the campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government" during the 2016 election. The Russia Collusion Hoax was debunked a second time.

65. Congress also investigated the matter. The U.S. House of Representatives, House Intelligence Committee, conducted an investigation and issued its report in March 2018 finding no evidence that President Trump or the Trump Campaign conspired with Russia to interfere in the

2016 election. Specifically, the House Intelligence Committee determined that the “Trump campaign did not collude with Russia.” The Russia Collusion Hoax was debunked again.

66. The U.S. Senate, Senate Intelligence Committee, conducted its own investigation that culminated in an identical finding that there was no evidence of collusion between President Trump, the Trump Campaign, and Russia. For a fourth time, the Russia Collusion Hoax had been officially debunked.

67. It is worth noting a primary piece of the Russia Collusion Hoax was the false claim that there was a secret link between President Trump or the Trump campaign and Alfa-Bank, a large Russian financial institution with alleged ties to Putin and members of the Russian government.

68. The FBI investigated these accusations, finding no such link existed and that by the time their investigation occurred these allegations had “already been debunked.” There was simply no link, channel, or anything of the sort between President Trump, the Trump campaign, and Alfa-Bank.

69. In October 2020, United States Attorney John Durham was appointed as special counsel to continue investigating the suspicious, partisan origins of the federal Trump-Russia investigation, including Crossfire Hurricane.

70. Ultimately, by July 2022 even the hyper-partisan Adam Schiff understood that much of what he alleged and professed to be true about the Russia Collusion Hoax in 2016 and 2017 had been exposed as false.

B. The *Times*’ and *Post*’s Propagation of the Russia Collusion Hoax

71. A large swath of Americans had a tremendous misunderstanding of the truth at the time the *Times*’ and the *Post*’s propagation of the Russia Collusion Hoax dominated the media.

72. Throughout 2017, daily newspaper and television coverage across the country fixated on Comey's firing, the appointment of Special Counsel Mueller, and the congressional investigations. Mainstream media coverage almost uniformly advanced the now-debunked allegations and pushed the established collusion narrative.

73. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, two of the nation's most prominent daily periodicals, led the way. Replete with cherry-picked facts, nefarious implications, and apprehensive suggestions largely originating from anonymous sources within the government, the *Times* and the *Post* repeatedly and maliciously used their platforms to propagandize and proliferate with evangelical fervor the fully false conspiracy theory that President Trump colluded with Vladimir Putin to help sway the 2016 election.

74. Remarkably, they were rewarded for lying to the American public. In April 2018, the staffs of the *Times* and the *Post* were jointly awarded the 2018 National Reporting Pulitzer Prize for their 2017 coverage. The citation reads:

For deeply sourced, relentlessly reported coverage in the public interest that dramatically furthered the nation's understanding of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and its connections to the Trump campaign, the President-elect's transition team and his eventual administration.²

75. In conferring the award, the Pulitzer Prize Board identified 20 articles submitted for consideration by the *Times* and the *Post* (the "Awarded Articles") as the award-receiving series. These submissions, which included hyperlinks to their previous or parallel coverage and imbedded videos, are representative of the overall false Russia Collusion Hoax narrative.

² 2018 Pulitzer Prizes - Journalism (available at <https://www.pulitzer.org/prize-winners-by-year/2018> (last visited December 12, 2022)).

76. Listed in chronological order below, the Awarded Articles are attached as **Composite Exhibit A**. They are summarized by the Pulitzer Prize Board on the Website as follows:³

- February 9, 2017 *Officials say Flynn discussed sanctions* (Washington Post)
- February 14, 2017 *White House received warning about Flynn* (Washington Post)
- March 1, 2017 *FBI was to pay author of Trump dossier* (Washington Post)
- March 2, 2017 *Sessions spoke twice to Russian envoy* (Washington Post)
- April 7, 2017 *Undisclosed On Forms, Kushner Met 2 Russians* (New York Times)
- April 23, 2017 *In Trying to Avoid Politics, Comey Shaped an Election* (New York Times)
- May 12, 2017 *President Shifts Rationale For Firing F.B.I. Director, Calling Him a 'Showboat'* (New York Times)
- May 16, 2017 *Trump reveals secret intelligence to Russians* (Washington Post)
- May 17, 2017 *Trump Appealed To Comey To Halt Inquiry Into Aide* (New York Times)
- May 18, 2017 *Trump Transition Said to Know Of Flynn Inquiry Before Hiring* (New York Times)
- May 20, 2017 *Trump Admitted Dismissal At F.B.I. Eased Pressure* (New York Times)
- May 23, 2017 *President asked intelligence chiefs to deny collusion* (Washington Post)
- June 15, 2017 *Trump's actions now a focus of Mueller inquiry* (Washington Post)
- June 23, 2017 *Obama's secret struggle to punish Russia for Putin's election assault* (Washington Post)

³ The links to the Awarded Articles remains active on the Website. See *The 2018 Pulitzer Prize Winner in National Reporting* (available at <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/staffs-new-york-times-and-washington-post> (Last visited December 12, 2022)). The Website may not correctly list the precise dates several of the Awarded Articles were originally published. Consequently, when a specific Awarded Article is referenced herein Plaintiff has attempted to identify such article by author, headline, publication, and original publication date.

- July 11, 2017 *Trump's Son Heard of Link To Moscow Before Meeting* (New York Times)
- July 12, 2017 *Emails Disclose Trump Son's Glee At Russian Offer* (New York Times)
- August 1, 2017 *Trump crafted son's statement on Russian contact* (Washington Post)
- September 8, 2017 *To Sway Vote, Russia Used Army of Fake Americans* (New York Times)
- December 14, 2017 *Doubting the intelligence, Trump pursues Putin and leaves a Russian threat unchecked* (Washington Post)
- December 31, 2017 *Unlikely Source Propelled Russian Meddling Inquiry* (New York Times)

77. The Awarded Articles are replete with references to the investigation of collusion between the Trump Campaign and Russian officials, and leave the reader with the intended impression that the investigation was authentic and not—as is now known—a worthless lie based on manufactured political disinformation paid for by the Clinton Campaign. For example:

- “[Former Deputy Attorney General and Acting Attorney General Sally] Yates and other officials were aware of an FBI investigation looking at possible contacts between Trump associates and Russia.”⁴
- President Trump “faces legal and political pressure on multiple Russia-related fronts. Last week, he fired FBI Director James B. Comey in the midst of a bureau investigation into possible links between the Trump campaign and Moscow.”⁵
- “The FBI, as well as the Senate Intelligence Committee, is investigating Russian interference in the election and alleged contacts between Trump’s associates and the Kremlin.”⁶
- Omissions in Jared Kushner’s security clearance forms were “particularly sensitive given the congressional and FBI investigations into contacts between Russian officials and Trump associates.”⁷

⁴ Adam Entous, et al., “Justice Department warned White House that Flynn could be vulnerable to Russian blackmail, officials say,” *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2017.

⁵ Greg Miller, et al., “Trump revealed highly classified information to Russian foreign minister and ambassador,” *The Washington Post*, May 15, 2017.

⁶ Tom Hamburger, et al., “FBI once planned to pay former British spy who authored controversial Trump dossier,” *The Washington Post*, February 28, 2017.

⁷ Jo Becker, et al., “Kushner Omitted Meeting with Russians on Security Clearance Forms,” *The New York Times*,

- *The New York Times* repeatedly cited congressional testimony by former Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe confirming “the existence of a ‘highly significant’ investigation into possible collusion between Mr. Trump’s associates and Russian operatives to sway the presidential election.”⁸

78. Facts that would later be shown as key to *discrediting* the sham Crossfire Hurricane investigation were spun in a way that advanced the Russia Collusion Hoax narrative. For example, an awarded entry published by the *Post* on or about March 1, 2017, reported that “[w]hile Trump has derided the [Steele] dossier as ‘fake news’ compiled by his political opponents, the FBI’s [payment] arrangement with Steele shows that the bureau considered him credible and found his information, while unproven, to be worthy of further investigation.”⁹

79. The Awarded Articles also imputed credibility to the Crossfire Hurricane investigation by inferring several key players associated with President Trump were long suspected of espionage. In a lengthy article about former FBI Director James Comey’s actions before the 2016 election, the *Times* reported that Trump campaign associate Carter Page “had previously been under F.B.I. scrutiny years earlier, as he was believed to have been marked for recruitment by Russian spies. And now he was a foreign policy adviser to Mr. Trump.”¹⁰ The article recounts Mr. Comey being briefed on the Steele Dossier and finding it “a provocative set of documents about purported dealings between shadowy Russian figures and Mr. Trump’s campaign.”

April 6, 2017.

⁸ Matthew Rosenberg, et al., “Trump Team Knew Flynn Was Under Investigation Before He Came to White House,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2017; Trump Shifts Rationale for Firing Comey, Calling Him a “Showboat,” *The New York Times*, May 11, 2017.

⁹ Tom Hamburger, et al., “FBI once planned to pay former British spy who authored controversial Trump dossier,” *The Washington Post*, February 28, 2017.

¹⁰ Matt Apuzzo, “Comey Tried to Shield the F.B.I. From Politics. Then He Shaped an Election,” *The New York Times*, April 22, 2017.

80. One report, filled with references to secret meetings and implying a *quid pro quo* with the Russians, spoke ominously of then-Businessman Trump's "compromising relationship with the Kremlin" and threats of blackmail. The writer quotes a public letter from former Senate Democrat leader Harry Reid to Comey stating that "it has become clear that you possess explosive information about close ties and coordination between Donald Trump, his top advisors, and the Russian government – a foreign interest openly hostile to the United States." Recounting the now clearly false Alfa-Bank conspiracy story peddled by indicted Clinton Campaign associate Michael Sussman, the article holds out hope that it might be true: "Agents concluded that the computer activity, while odd, probably did not represent a covert channel" (emphasis supplied).

81. Other articles suggest that President Trump obstructed or otherwise unlawfully interfered in the government's investigation, reporting on President Trump's interactions with former FBI Director James Comey to imply ties between the Trump campaign and the Russian government. In one example, the *Times* reported on President Trump's statements to then-Director Comey about the Michael Flynn investigation as "the clearest evidence that the president has tried to directly influence the Justice Department and F.B.I. investigation into links between Mr. Trump's associates and Russia."¹¹

82. A few days later, a different *Times* article reported President Trump's statements to Russian officials about firing Mr. Comey and asserted that the conversation "reinforces the notion that the president dismissed [Mr. Comey] primarily because of the bureau's investigation into possible collusion between Mr. Trump's campaign and Russian operatives."¹² In kind, *The Post* reported that "President Trump asked two of the nation's top intelligence officials in March to help

¹¹Michael Schmidt, "Comey Memo Says Trump Asked Him to End Flynn Investigation," *The New York Times*, May 16, 2017.

¹²Matt Apuzzo, "Trump Told Russians That Firing 'Nut Job' Comey Eased Pressure From Investigation," *The New York Times*, May 19, 2017.

him push back against an FBI investigation into possible coordination between his campaign and the Russian government,”¹³ and characterized the widening of Special Counsel Mueller’s probe as “now includ[ing] an examination of whether President Trump attempted to obstruct justice” by dismissing Comey.¹⁴

83. While President Trump’s actions have since been shown to be justified, even prescient, they were framed by both the *Times* and the *Post* so readers would conclude they were evidence of an attempted cover-up.

84. This was the typical treatment of facts that did not naturally fit the narrative. At every stage, the conduct of President Trump and his associates were intentionally interpreted and presented to the public in a manner that would support the Russia Collusion Hoax. For example, in July 2017, both the *Times* and the *Post* reported a non-story about a June 2016 meeting between Donald Trump, Jr. and a “Kremlin-connected Russian lawyer” who apparently lured the President’s son to a meeting by offering derogatory information about Hillary Clinton. This lawyer later used the meeting to unsuccessfully lobby against the 2012 Magnitsky Act, which imposes sanctions on foreign officials who violate human rights.¹⁵

85. In a chillingly propagandistic inversion, given that the Clinton Campaign was actively peddling manufactured derogatory information about President Trump to law enforcement through the Steele Dossier and its own false claims of ties between President Trump and Alfa-Bank, the *Times* and *Post* each presented Donald Trump, Jr.’s alleged eagerness to hear derogatory

¹³Adam Entous, et al., “Trump asked intelligence chiefs to push back against FBI collusion probe after Comey revealed its existence,” *The Washington Post*, May 22, 2017.

¹⁴Devlin Barrett, et al., “Special counsel is investigating Trump for possible obstruction of justice, officials say,” *The Washington Post*, June 14, 2017.

¹⁵Jo Becker, et al., “Russian Dirt on Clinton? ‘I Love It,’ Donald Trump Jr. Said,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 2017; Matt Apuzzo, et al., “Trump Jr. Was Told in Email of Russian Effort to Aid Campaign,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 2017; Ashley Parker, et al., “Trump dictated son’s misleading statement on meeting with Russian lawyer,” *The Washington Post*, July 31, 2017.

information being offered about Hillary Clinton as just what one would expect from the son of a candidate whose campaign was conspiring and cooperating with the Russian government to become president.

86. The establishment's favored presidents were treated much differently, demonstrating the inherent subjective bias against President Trump. As part of the Awarded Articles, *The Washington Post* also published a "Hacking Democracy" series that included an article titled "Obama's secret struggle to punish Russia for Putin's election assault"¹⁶ and one headlined, "Doubting the intelligence, Trump pursues Putin and leaves a Russian threat unchecked."¹⁷ Complete with a graphic depicting President Obama staring down Russian President Putin juxtaposed with an image of President Trump shaking hands with President Putin, the lengthy articles recount the Obama Administration's reaction to the Steele Dossier, likening Cabinet-level national security meetings about Russia's election interference efforts to the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan. The articles also clearly insinuate a *quid pro quo*, where President Trump did Putin's bidding, for example, by criticizing NATO, in exchange for Putin's alleged efforts to influence the outcome of the 2016 election.

87. Throughout, the Awarded Articles paint a striking picture: that the origins and conduct of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation were authentic, that the investigation's largely anonymous sources were trustworthy, that President Trump and his campaign had conspired and coordinated with the Russian government to tip the 2016 election in his favor, and that upon taking office in 2017 President Trump and his political associates tried to cover their tracks by obstructing justice. All of this is false.

¹⁶Greg Miller, et al., "Obama's secret struggle to punish Russia for Putin's election assault," *The Washington Post*, June 23, 2017.

¹⁷Greg Miller, et al., "Doubting the intelligence, Trump pursues Putin and leaves a Russian threat unchecked," *The Washington Post*, December 14, 2017.

88. In short, the theme established by and pervading the Awarded Articles is that the now irrefutably debunked Russia Collusion Hoax was, in fact, real.

C. The 2018 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting

89. The Pulitzer Prize has been awarded annually since 1917.¹⁸ The Pulitzer Prize is widely recognized as the pinnacle of American journalistic achievement, viewed as an honor bestowed on only the best, most well-deserving journalists in recognition of their extraordinary efforts in the past year.

90. Entries must come from a U.S. newspaper, magazine, or news site that “publishes regularly.” Broadcast media and their websites are ineligible. The Website unabashedly professes that “all entries [for a Pulitzer Prize] must adhere to the highest journalistic principles”¹⁹ Such principles presumably include ideals like truth in reporting, loyal to the reader, source verification, writer objectivity, and press independence.

91. Conferral of a Pulitzer Prize—particularly one awarded for National Reporting—consequently carries very important connotations. The public presumes that a winning entry objectively presented all the material facts on a recent subject of public significance, and a halo effect encompasses the winning reporter, organization, and their sources as being inherently credible on important, complicated matters.

92. The Pulitzer Prize Board members are editors, publishers, writers, and J-school professors who are elected by their peers to three-year terms. Collectively, the members act as

¹⁸ *Pulitzer Prize Winners by Year* (available at <https://www.pulitzer.org/prize-winners-by-year> (Last visited December 12, 2022)).

¹⁹ *Frequently Asked Questions – The Pulitzer Prizes: What news organizations are eligible for the journalism competition?* (available at <https://www.pulitzer.org/page/frequently-asked-questions>) (Last visited December 12, 2022).

both kingmakers and historians: crowning the best of the past year from the American press and establishing the “stories of the year” for posterity. It is truly the establishment’s establishment.

93. Typically, the Pulitzer Prize Board selects past or aspiring members to serve on a “jury” tasked with evaluating the individual submissions and providing three finalists to the Pulitzer Prize Board in each category.

94. The Pulitzer Prize Board then selects the winners from the finalists provided by the jury for each category.

95. The process is not infallible. Over the years, there have been occasions for the Pulitzer Prize Board to rescind prizes that were later discovered to have failed to live up to its standards. For example, in 1981 a Pulitzer Prize awarded to a *Post* reporter was rescinded by the Pulitzer Prize Board after she admitted to having fabricated her story.

96. As recently as 2020, the Pulitzer Prize Board accepted the withdrawal of one of three finalists in the International Reporting category after the *Times* concluded that the work, submitted by one of its reporters, failed internal standards for accuracy. The Pulitzer Prize Board accepted the withdrawal.

97. In fact, the Pulitzer Prize Board claims to have a standing process for reviewing questions about past awards and even maintains guidelines about which complaints are considered by an appointed committee. Beyond this, little is known to outsiders about the Pulitzer Prize Board’s review process.

98. Ultimately, the 2018 Pulitzer Prize Board selected the staffs of *both* the *Times* and the *Post* as joint winners of the 2018 National Reporting Prize for the Awarded Articles, a representative series of 20 articles published in 2017 covering the Russia Collusion Hoax.

99. The 2018 award was an anomaly in the history of the Pulitzer Prizes, and the details of its conferral are shrouded in secrecy. The 2018 *Times* submission in the National Reporting category was not originally selected by the jury as a finalist. Nonetheless, the *Times*' entry was directly moved into contention by the Pulitzer Prize Board and then jointly awarded the Pulitzer Prize the *Post*. Strangely, no one seemed to complain about this aberration from the established process. At least not publicly.

100. On or about April 16, 2018, the Pulitzer Prize Board announced its 2018 Pulitzer Prizes, for work published the previous year. This included the joint award to the *Times* and the *Post* in the category of National Reporting.

101. The citation awarded to the *Times* and the *Post* states as follows:

For deeply sourced, relentlessly reported coverage in the public interest that dramatically furthered the nation's understanding of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and its connections to the Trump campaign, the President-elect's transition team and his eventual administration.²⁰

102. By elevating the *Times*' entry from the discard pile to finalist, and then jointly awarding the Pulitzer Prize to both the *Times* and the *Post*, the Pulitzer Prize Board signaled it was not simply evaluating the quality of the organizations' individual submissions but rather acknowledging the Russia Collusion Hoax as the biggest story of 2017 and rewarding all the key players for their successful propagation of and commitment to the false narrative.

103. With so many hallmarks of an *actual quid pro quo*, it is telling that no public complaints were raised by those supposedly dogged newsroom staffs who had relentlessly pursued President Trump and written the stories of their career, and were then forced to share the award of a lifetime with their primary competitor. The establishment indeed protects its own.

²⁰ The 2018 Pulitzer Prize Winner in National Reporting (available at <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/staffs-new-york-times-and-washington-post>) (Last visited December 12, 2022).

104. Despite the Pulitzer Prize Board's assertions in the 2018 award citation, it is now clear that the award recipients performed a tremendous public *disservice* and left a broad swath of Americans with an immense *misunderstanding* of the truth behind the Russia Collusion Hoax, which the staffs of the *Times* and *Post* were instrumental in both creating and perpetuating.

105. The proper role of the free press is to report the news, not manufacture it.

106. Over time, the indisputable falsity of the Russia Collusion Hoax's primary premise has become clear: *there was no connection* between the Trump campaign, the President-elect's transition team, or the Trump administration, with any Russian attempts to interfere with the 2016 presidential election.

107. Yet this demonstrably false connection was and remains the stated basis for the conferral of the 2018 Pulitzer Prize in National Reporting.

108. Moreover, secondary themes within the Russia Collusion Hoax pervade the Awarded Articles, like the authenticity of the Steele Dossier, the FBI's proper use of FISA warrants, and what had been characterized as President Trump's obstruction of a legitimate investigation. These also proved to be false.

109. While elements at both the *Times* and the *Post* were almost certainly complicit in the Russia Collusion Hoax, is ultimately immaterial whether the authors of the Awarded Articles understood at the time they were propagating political disinformation manufactured by paid sources in an attempt mislead the public and tarnish President Trump's reputation and political prospects.

110. What matters instead is the Defendants' conduct, particularly when many of the key assertions and premises of the Russia Collusion Hoax that permeated the Awarded Articles

had been revealed by the Mueller Report and congressional investigations as false after the 2018 Pulitzer Prize in National Reporting had been awarded.

D. The Defendants' Defamatory Statement

111. On September 30, 2021, President Trump sent a letter to the Pulitzer Prize Board demanding the revocation of the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting and asking the Pulitzer Prize Board to rectify the situation and correct the record. Several Defendants sat on the Pulitzer Prize Board at the time.

112. Several days later, on October 3, 2021, President Trump published the September 30 letter publicly.

113. In apparent response, on November 12, 2021, the *Post* retracted statements from several articles from 2017 relating to the Steele Dossier and other alleged connections between the Trump campaign and Russia, based on information revealed in subsequent government investigations. The retracted articles, which also advanced the Russia Collusion Hoax narrative, were conveniently omitted from the specific articles submitted by the *Post* for the 2018 Pulitzer Prize.

114. On November 15, 2021, President Trump, through counsel, again demanded the Pulitzer Prize Board withdraw the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting noting, among other things, the recent correction by the *Post*. The Pulitzer Prize Board took no action.

115. President Trump, through counsel, repeated this demand in a letter dated May 27, 2022 after Defendants were seated as members of the Pulitzer Prize Board. Defendants took no action.

116. On July 5, 2022, through counsel, President Trump provided Defendants with additional information about how the Awarded Articles had been debunked, in an attempt to aid Defendants’ “standing process” for the review of past awards and correct the record.

117. In apparent response, on July 18, 2022, Defendants posted the following statement on the Website (the “Pulitzer Statement”):²¹

A Statement from the Pulitzer Prize Board

The Pulitzer Prize Board has an established, formal process by which complaints against winning entries are carefully reviewed. In the last three years, the Pulitzer Board has received inquiries, including from former President Donald Trump, about submissions from The New York Times and The Washington Post on Russian interference in the U.S. election and its connections to the Trump campaign—submissions that jointly won the 2018 National Reporting prize.

These inquiries prompted the Pulitzer Board to commission two independent reviews of the work submitted by those organizations to our National Reporting competition. Both reviews were conducted by individuals with no connection to the institutions whose work was under examination, nor any connection to each other. The separate reviews converged in their conclusions: that no passages or headlines, contentions or assertions in any of the winning submissions were discredited by facts that emerged subsequent to the conferral of the prizes.

The 2018 Pulitzer Prizes in National Reporting stand.

118. Defendants, with knowledge or reckless disregard for its falsity, published the Pulitzer Statement, which includes the false implication that there was a connection between President Trump, his 2016 presidential election campaign, and Russia.

119. Defendants, with knowledge or reckless disregard for its falsity, published the Pulitzer Statement, including the passage “that no passages or headlines, contentions or assertions in any of the winning submissions” that advanced the Russia Collusion Hoax, had been “discredited by facts that emerged subsequent to the conferral of the prizes,” such that the reader

²¹ *A Statement from the Pulitzer Prize Board*, <https://www.pulitzer.org/news/statement-pulitzer-prize-board-2> (Last visited December 12, 2022).

is left with the intended false implication that the Awarded Articles had correctly reported on the Russia Collusion Hoax.

120. When the Pulitzer Statement was published, Defendants knew that the Russia Collusion Hoax had been thoroughly discredited numerous times by exhaustive, credible, official investigations, contradicting the “deeply sourced, relentlessly reported” Awarded Articles that allegedly were “in the public interest” and “dramatically furthered the nation’s understanding of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and its connections to the Trump campaign, the President-elect’s transition team and his eventual administration.” At the time of publication, nearly every branch and agency of the federal government had examined this issue and reached the same conclusion: there was no conspiracy or cooperation between President Trump or the Trump Campaign and Russia.

121. Defendants, with knowledge or reckless disregard for its falsity, published the Pulitzer Statement, including the passage stating “independent reviews” had “converged on their conclusions” that the Awarded Articles had not been discredited by “facts that emerged subsequent to the conferral” of the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting, such that the reader is left with the intended false implication that the Awarded Articles had been objectively, thoroughly, and independently reviewed for veracity *twice*, and that the separate conclusions had each *accredited* the accuracy on the Awarded Articles.

122. On the facts known to Defendants at the time these reviews were allegedly conducted, it would have been impossible that a single objective, thorough, and independent review would have reached such a conclusion, much less two. Defendants knew this and published the Pulitzer Statement anyway.

123. Defendants intentionally withheld the identities of the reviewing parties, omitted the process by which the Awarded Articles were reviewed, and held back the specific results of the reviews from publication in the Pulitzer Statement to shield themselves from criticism, conceal the inherent bias of the sham review process, and ultimately to resurrect the debunked Russia Collusion Hoax in which they are so heavily invested.

124. The Pulitzer Statement was knowingly published by Defendants to create a false implication in the mind of the reader that “the Trump campaign, the President-elect’s transition team and his eventual administration” was connected with Russian attempts to interfere in the 2016 presidential election. Defendants did so with actual malice and the intention to harm President Trump and his reputation.

125. The Pulitzer Statement was communicated by Defendants through the internet about President Trump, a resident of Florida.

126. The Pulitzer Statement was intended to be accessed, and was actually accessed, by third parties in Florida.

127. As of this filing, the Pulitzer Statement remains posted on the Website.

COUNT I

(Defamation by Implication as to All Defendants)

128. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference the allegations in paragraphs 1-127 above as if fully set forth herein.

129. Defendants posted the Pulitzer Statement on the internet-accessible Website, and it was accessed in Okeechobee County, Florida.

130. The Pulitzer Statement contains the juxtaposition of a series of facts so as to imply a defamatory connection between them and omits other facts to create a defamatory implication.

131. Defendants published the Pulitzer Statement on the news section of the Website so the false implication it creates would be widely disseminated and repeated in Okeechobee County, Florida and beyond.

132. Defendants juxtaposed certain facts and omitted critical facts such that the reader is left with the intended false implication that the Russia Collusion Hoax was true and had not been debunked. *Jews For Jesus, Inc. v. Rapp*, 997 So. 2d 1098, 1106 (Fla. 2008).

133. Defendants juxtaposed certain facts and omitted critical facts regarding the origins and processes of the supposedly “independent reviews” such that the reader is left with the intended false implication that the Awarded Articles that received the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting were not only accurate but had been *independently and objectively authenticated as such*.

134. By keeping the reviewers anonymous, shielding the specifics of the review process from public scrutiny, and only providing a self-serving summary of the reviews “converging” on their respective conclusions, Defendants failed to provide sufficient information for readers to weigh for themselves the likelihood of the Pulitzer Statement’s veracity, increasing the risk that readers would reach Defendant’s desired, unfair, and incorrect conclusion that the Awarded Articles were accurate and the Russia Collusion Hoax was true.

135. When Defendants published the Pulitzer Statement they were in possession of the information showing the Russia Collusion Hoax to be false. Defendants intentionally omitted these facts to create the false impression that President Trump colluded with Russia to gain an advantage in the 2016 presidential election.

136. Alternatively, if Defendants were somehow *not* aware the Russia Collusion Hoax was false at the time the Pulitzer Statement was published, Defendants purposely avoided further investigation with the intent to avoid the truth.

137. In either case, Defendants published the Pulitzer Statement with actual malice.

138. Defendants knew that the intended implication of the Pulitzer Statement was false, while entertaining serious doubts as to the veracity of the implication it created, or while highly aware that the account was probably false.

139. Defendants published the Pulitzer Statement in an attempt to protect and further their own financial and political interests. Defendants' knew their credibility as an organization and their individual and collective roles as kingmakers and historians within the media establishment would be endangered if they conceded the grave error in awarding the 2018 Pulitzer Prize in National Reporting to the staffs of the *Times* and the *Post* for propagating a now-completely-debunked witch hunt like the Russia Collusion Hoax.

140. Maintaining their prestigious positions within the media elite required Defendants to resist President Trump's requests to correct the record and instead demonstrate loyalty to the establishment's monolithic opposition to President Trump, even at the expense of the truth.

141. Defendants knew that when the history books are written regarding the events of 2016 and 2017 that the prestigious Pulitzer Prize Board's 2022 *endorsement* of the Russia Collusion Hoax would resurrect the now-debunked myth for posterity.

142. Plaintiff seeks a declaration from this Court that the Pulitzer Statement, including its intended implications, is defamatory. Plaintiff seeks an Order from this Court preventing Defendants from making any further publication of the Pulitzer Statement.

143. Plaintiff has been damaged by the publication of the Pulitzer Statement because it is intended to leave the reader with the false impression that President Trump colluded with a hostile foreign government to undermine a United States presidential election, and is further intended to stoke feelings of hatred, distrust, and discouragement in the reader toward Plaintiff.

144. Plaintiff's reputation, profession, and business has been damaged by the Pulitzer Statement because the Pulitzer Statement wrongfully implies criminal, wrongful, and un-American conduct unbecoming Plaintiff's position as the duly elected President of the United States, his profession as a businessman, and candidate for president.

145. Plaintiff has been actually damaged in an amount to be proven at trial by the publication of the Pulitzer Statement.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendants for compensatory damages in an amount to be proven at trial, a judicial declaration that the Pulitzer Statement published by Defendants is defamatory, and permanent injunctive relief prohibiting further publication of the Pulitzer Statement, together with Plaintiff's costs, expenses, and such further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

The Plaintiff requests trial by jury on all issues so triable.

DATED: December 13, 2022

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ R. Quincy Bird
R. Quincy Bird (FBN 105746)
Jeremy D. Bailie (FBN 118558)
WEBER, CRABB & WEIN, P.A.
5453 Central Avenue
St. Petersburg, FL 33710
Telephone: (727) 828-9919
Facsimile: (727) 828-9924

Primary: quincy.bird@webercrabb.com
jeremy.bailie@webercrabb.com
Secondary: honey.rechtin@webercrabb.com
carol.sweeney@webercrabb.com

Attorneys for President Donald J. Trump

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that on December 13, 2022, a true and correct copy of the foregoing was electronically filed with the Clerk of the Court using the Florida Courts e-Filing Portal, and will be served via Service of Process on Defendants.

/s/ R. Quincy Bird

Attorney

UNOFFICIAL
DOCUMENT