

# [***Exclusive: 'Trump Employee 5,' who unknowingly helped move classified documents, speaks out***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BHT-RSR1-DY7V-G00M-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

March 11, 2024 Monday 8:00 PM GMT

Copyright 2024 Cable News Network All Rights Reserved

**Length:** 2263 words

**Byline:** By Katelyn Polantz, Kaitlan Collins and Jeremy Herb, CNN

**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; A longtime Mar-a-Lago employee who is a central witness in the investigation into former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/president-donald-trump-45)'s handling of classified documents is now speaking publicly because he believes that voters should hear the truth about his former boss and the case before the November election.

Brian Butler, who is referenced as "Trump Employee 5" in [*the classified documents indictment*](https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2023/06/politics/annotated-trump-indictment-dg/) brought by special counsel Jack Smith, told CNN in an exclusive interview that he doesn't believe the criminal case against Trump is a "witch hunt," as the former president has claimed.

Butler gave testimony to federal investigators that informed crucial portions of last year's criminal obstruction charges against Trump and his two co-defendants, Walt Nauta, a personal aide to Trump, and Carlos De Oliveira, a property manager at Mar-a-Lago who had been Butler's closest friend until recently.

Butler, who was employed at Mar-a-Lago for 20 years, has spoken repeatedly with investigators, paying for his own attorney and breaking with the orbit around Trump that he knows so well - setting him apart from his former colleagues and friends as his former boss has been named in multiple federal investigations.

Butler told CNN how he unknowingly helped Nauta deliver boxes of classified information from Mar-a-Lago to the former president's plane in June 2022 - the same day that Trump and his attorney were meeting with the Justice Department at Mar-a-Lago about the classified documents.

That day, June 3, 2022, Butler received what he remembers as a strange request from Nauta, who wanted to know if he could borrow an Escalade from the car service Butler ran for Mar-a-Lago. Trump and his family were about to fly to New Jersey that day for the summer, and it was typically Butler and his valets who handled getting their luggage onto the plane.

But it was an unusual request from Nauta for the car, Butler says, because Nauta typically didn't handle moving luggage and asked Butler for the car in a guarded way.

Butler says Nauta and De Oliveira loaded up the vehicle before driving it to the West Palm Beach airport. Butler arrived with his own car filled with Trump family luggage, then helped Nauta load Trump's plane with the luggage - as well as bankers boxes of documents that were in the Escalade. Butler says he didn't realize the bankers boxes contained anything out of the ordinary.

"I left Mar-a-Lago. I texted him, 'Hey, I'm on my way.' He followed me. He pulled out and got behind me. We got to the airport. I ended up loading all the luggage I had - and he had a bunch of boxes," Butler said of Nauta.

"They were the boxes that were in the indictment, the white bankers boxes. That's what I remember loading," Butler added.

Three months after the FBI removed hundreds of government records from Mar-a-Lago in August 2022, Butler left his job as a club valet and manager, in part due to a growing restlessness to move on.

Butler says he has considered for months going public about his role in the obstruction case against Trump as he has carefully followed developments in the criminal case. Butler says he decided to sit down with CNN exclusively in West Palm Beach on Monday out of a wish to tell the truth and share what he knows to those who may doubt the facts of the case.

Butler, who has not previously been named publicly, is referenced six times in the Justice Department's indictment as "Trump Employee 5." The references made to Butler in the indictment capture only an inkling of what he knows and could be asked to speak about on the witness stand - all of which he says he's already shared with prosecutors, giving them a window into scenes where other witnesses may have been close-lipped or allegedly misleading.

A lawyer for Trump declined to comment to CNN, as did a lawyer for Nauta. An attorney for De Oliveira, John Irving, said in a statement, "We look forward to hearing more about Mr. Butler's version of events when he is under oath and subject to penalty of perjury in the courtroom where that belongs, and we decline to try this case in the media."

The special counsel's office spokesman also declined to comment.

A secret trip to Florida

Butler also was a witness in the room to several conversations that allegedly capture how Trump was positioning his closest aide Nauta, De Oliveira and others to thwart federal authorities.

De Oliveira told Butler, for instance, about Nauta traveling to Palm Beach in late June 2022, at a time when Nauta and De Oliveira were allegedly interested in deleting surveillance tapes of a storage room where the boxes had been kept at the club, according to the indictment.

Butler recalls that De Oliveira told him Nauta would be visiting. Then a day later, De Oliveira warned Butler that Nauta's visit should be kept secret. De Oliveira told Butler that Nauta was interested in learning about how surveillance footage from the club would be saved - another oddity to Butler, he says.

He says he now looks back at his last few months at Mar-a-Lago with a clarity only the indictment of Trump could bring. The behavior of Trump and Nauta toward him -especially on days where investigators were seeking details from Trump - now make sense, like puzzle pieces that have come together, Butler says.

The longtime valet

Butler, 41, is a natural narrator of the world of Trump in South Florida.

He has known Trump since 2002 and can recount detailed conversations with him, his family and guests at Mar-a-Lago. Butler worked alongside his closest friends at the club, first and foremost De Oliveira. The two would sing karaoke together or celebrate each other's birthdays off property.

Because of his close-knit friendships, Butler has years of text messages and photos on his cell phone. His time as a chauffeur to countless visitors and Trump family members provided deep insight into the inner workings of Trump's orbit.

The Florida native took the job working for Trump 21 years ago, as a seasonal valet at Mar-a-Lago making little over $30,000 a year. A man bubbling with ideas and energy, Butler pitched Trump personally a few years later about starting a car service for travelers visiting Trump properties in South Florida. It's one of several businesses Butler has started to support his family.

The Mar-a-Lago car service grew into a major part of his life for a decade, eventually earning him more than three times his initial salary, he says, and empowering him as an entrepreneurial spirit who grew close to many in the social network around Trump.

But the MAGA approach to ***politics*** in recent years, the intensifying FBI investigation, and Trump's apparently cavalier attitude toward national security soured Butler on staying at his Mar-a-Lago job after Trump's presidency.

Disillusioned with how the club had grown into a more transactional environment for Trump during his presidency, Butler quit Mar-a-Lago in November 2022. That year, he watched his friends and former co-workers' lives become disrupted because of the developing criminal case.

Butler says now he believes Trump hasn't just divided the country. He has also divided people's communities, including his own two-decade relationship with his best friend De Oliveira.

"I felt like it was a total no-win situation for me. I mean, they're asking me questions about one of my best friends. I'm being honest. But I also have a bad feeling that what I'm saying is getting him into trouble," Butler told CNN. "Nobody should have to go through that. And for him (Trump) to get up there all the time and say the things he says about this being a witch hunt and everything. ... He just can't take responsibility for anything."

Nightly walks

Given how many of his Mar-a-Lago coworkers had been caught up in the investigation, Butler knew it wouldn't be long before prosecutors contacted him.

Butler and De Oliveria live only a few hundred feet apart in their Palm Beach Gardens neighborhood. Multiple times a week, they would go on nightly walks, often discussing the buzz around the club.

While out walking with De Oliveira one evening in early March 2023, months after the FBI search of Mar-a-Lago, Butler got an urgent call from his wife: He needed to come home immediately, because FBI agents had just shown up.

Butler went to meet the agents, he says, while De Oliveria, who had already been approached by authorities separately and allegedly withheld information from them, hung back, watching.

Despite their close-knit friendship, Butler and De Oliveria took two very different approaches to the FBI. De Oliveria has been charged with lying to federal investigators, who accuse him of repeatedly denying seeing or knowing anything about boxes of documents at Mar-a-Lago, despite personally moving them. He has pleaded not guilty.

At one point in their walks during the investigation, Butler says De Oliveira told him they were "all dirty" regarding moving boxes.

While De Oliveira has used an attorney provided through Trump's network, Butler has not.

Butler had an existing relationship with Jeffrey Sloman, a former US attorney for the Southern District of Florida, due to an unrelated lawsuit. But Butler says he has resisted repeated inquiries from De Oliveira nudging him to use an attorney found and paid for by Trump.

Transactional meeting

Butler proved to be a valuable witness for Smith's team. Given his long history at Trump's club, Butler shed light on potentially critical instances related to the disclosure of classified information.

At one point in his interviews, Butler says he told investigators that Australian billionaire Anthony Pratt repeated classified submarine secrets following a conversation with Trump in spring 2021.

Pratt met with Trump and heard from the former president about US and Russian submarines at their meeting, then relayed that information to his chief of staff while in the backseat of Butler's car. Butler later told investigators he was shocked that Trump would share such information with a foreign citizen who paid excessive sums for access to Mar-a-Lago.

Butler says he believes the relationship was indicative of how a club member sought access to Trump once he became president.

Pratt, who has previously declined to comment to CNN, has been interviewed by Smith's team. A representative to Pratt did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Palm Beach friendship

In addition to the movement of the boxes, Butler also witnessed the scene where Trump allegedly attempted to keep De Oliveira in his fold.

While Butler and De Oliveira had been nearly inseparable for a decade, their relationship changed around the time De Oliveira became a target of the criminal investigation last year.

Over the years Butler captured his closeness with De Oliveira in his cell phone archive: Nearly a decade ago, there's Butler's young daughter hugging De Oliveira in a booth at a restaurant. There's De Oliveira and Butler posing in their work uniforms, both much younger than they are now, walkie talkies clipped to their khakis. And he has a posed photo of all staff at Mar-a-Lago with then-President Trump and first lady Melania Trump lined up a few feet away from Butler and De Oliveira, side by side.

There are videos of putts De Oliveira made on the golf course - one so sweet and triumphant De Oliveira showed it to Trump; of idle time at work where De Oliveira pretends he's a club member ordering a cocktail or the supervisor sitting at Butler's desk; of a Taylor Swift karaoke session in Butler's living room after a round of golf, days before De Oliveira's indictment.

"The good days," Butler calls the clips now.

In one, from 2019, Trump walks by the pair, asking Butler if he's doing well. "Good," Butler replies. "Carlos is good," Butler says to Trump, then pats his friend on the back.

The few seconds capture the dynamic between the two men that persisted even into the early days of the documents investigation: Butler as protective of his buddy, and as the supervisor in Trump's universe whom Trump's aides often reached out to first.

Butler told CNN on Monday that De Oliveira was known to have a good relationship with Trump.

The conversation echoes one prosecutors picked up on years later which now forms the very last allegation in the indictment. In August 2022, while Butler and De Oliveira enjoyed a long weekend with family at a Florida casino for Butler to celebrate his 40th birthday, Nauta reached out to Butler "to make sure Carlos is good," prosecutors allege.

Butler assured Nauta twice that De Oliveira was loyal and wouldn't do anything to hurt his relationship with Trump.

Prosecutors say Trump then called De Oliveira to tell him he would get his property manager a lawyer.

Butler and De Oliveira were at the casino's food court when that call came in, Butler recalls. De Oliveira hung up the phone, happily, and told Butler that Trump would provide him an attorney, Butler says.

"You know, he takes the call. We're standing in the food court. I think we went to sit down," Butler told CNN. "I can't remember how long the conversation was. But I know at the end of the conversation when they hung up, Carlos said, 'He's gonna get me an attorney.'"

Butler recounted the story to prosecutors and provided them access to his two cell phones.

Since the Trump indictment, Butler has seen De Oliveira from afar in their neighborhood, and in news clips as his friend comes and goes from a federal courtroom.

The two men no longer speak.

By Katelyn Polantz, Kaitlan Collins and Jeremy Herb, CNN

TM & © 2024 Cable News Network, Inc., a Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

**Load-Date:** April 10, 2024

**End of Document**