

Stris & Maher, the LA Boutique, Claims ‘Total Victory’ in Settlement About Alleged Trump Affair

Peter Stris, who has argued seven U.S. Supreme Court cases, called ex-Playboy model Karen McDougal’s settlement “probably the most rewarding result I ever got in my career.”

BY MARCIA COYLE

Despite outside pressure to continue his lawsuit, Peter Stris of Stris & Maher on Wednesday night declared “total victory” in a settlement on behalf of former Playboy model Karen McDougal who allegedly had an affair with President Donald Trump.

Stris negotiated the settlement with American Media Inc., owner of the National Enquirer, which had paid McDougal \$150,000 for the rights to her story about Trump shortly before the presidential election. AMI, in the contract, also had committed to feature her future fitness articles and photos in its magazine. A story about her relationship with Trump was never published.

“If this contract had been voided, she would have had to pay back the \$150,000,” Stris told MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow. “Here she got out of every obligation under the contract. She doesn’t have to do articles. She doesn’t have to take pictures. They gave her life rights back immediately—minus \$75,000 if she happens to sell it, which she doesn’t



Peter Stris of the boutique Stris & Maher appeared on Rachel Maddow’s MSNBC show Wednesday night.

want to. And that’s the maximum they get. They get 10 percent up to \$75,000. That’s basically the best we could have gotten had we litigated this to the end.”

McDougal was represented by entertainment lawyer Keith Davidson in the contract negotiations with AMI in August 2016. It was subsequently learned that Davidson had been in contact with Trump’s personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, at the time.

AMI said in a statement Wednesday: “AMI is pleased that we reached an amicable resolution with Ms. McDougal today that provides both sides what they wanted as a result.”

Maddow asked Stris, whose boutique firm handles complex and U.S. Supreme Court litigation, if he had experienced political pressure from anyone to settle the case. “Just the opposite,” he said.

“What’s made this so difficult is people want to see a fight; people want to see this used to essentially expose the things that are going on,” said Stris, referring indirectly to the recent legal actions surrounding Cohen. “When you’re a lawyer and you represent a client—the reason people like Michael Cohen and Keith Davidson are creating all this mischief is because they’re not faithfully representing people.”

When McDougal came to him, Stris recalled, she said she wanted out of the contract—no money, just the ability to tell her side of the story without fear of retribution. She was “unbelievably frightened,” Stris said, because AMI allegedly threatened to sue her for millions of dollars and to destroy her reputation if she spoke publicly. McDougal was able to do an interview with CNN’s Anderson Cooper, he said, because Stris had filed his lawsuit against AMI.

Stris said he was fully prepared to take depositions to get documents and recordings. “Nothing would have made me personally

happier, but that’s not what Karen wanted. What Karen wanted was not to be beholden to this company,” he said.

McDougal turned to Stris for help on the recommendation of Theodore Boutrous of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher. Boutrous had made an offer on Twitter to provide pro bono legal assistance to anyone attacked by Trump for exercising his or her free speech rights. Stris contacted Boutrous and offered to join him. Stris told Maddow that his firm had donated “hundreds of thousands of dollars and time” to her case.

Just earlier in the day, Stris and a partner, Daniel Geysler, were at the U.S. Supreme Court for argument in *Lagos v. United States*. Geysler argued for Sergio Fernando Lagos in a dispute over federal victim restitution.

Stris, who has argued seven Supreme Court cases, called the McDougal settlement “probably the most rewarding result I ever got in my career.” McDougal, he said, was the victim of a “pattern of powerful men” trying to silence women.

“If people can’t appreciate the fact that someone caught up in that has the right to have their voice and to have someone represent them to get out of it, then I really have no tolerance for them,” he said. “That’s how the system should work.”

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