President Donald Trump offered unexpected praise Friday to New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani, congratulating him at the White House on what he called an “incredible race,” despite weeks of fierce criticism from the president and his allies.

Mamdani, 34, is a Ugandan-born democratic socialist, a state lawmaker from Queens and the city’s first Muslim mayor-elect. His victory earlier this month unsettled national Republicans, who argued his agenda signaled a leftward shift inside the Democratic Party. But during their first meeting, both men set aside their past clashes and emphasized shared goals for the country’s largest city.

“We have one thing in common as we want this city of ours that we love to do very well,” Trump said in the Oval Office. “And I wanted to congratulate the mayor. He really won an incredible race.”

The friendly tone marked a sharp departure from Trump’s earlier denunciations, including calling Mamdani a “communist lunatic.” On Friday, Trump instead described him as a “winner” and said he hoped Mamdani would be “a really great mayor.”

Mamdani avoided repeating his own criticism of Trump, including calling some of his policies “fascist.” He said their conversation focused on “the shared purpose of serving New Yorkers.”

Trump brushed off the past remark with a laugh. “I’ve been called much worse than a despot,” he said. When a reporter pressed Mamdani on whether he still believed Trump was a fascist, the president interjected: “That’s OK, you can just say yes.” Mamdani smiled and replied, “OK,” as Trump patted him on the arm.

The cordial exchange contrasted sharply with Republican attacks in recent weeks. House Speaker Mike Johnson had repeatedly cited Mamdani as evidence that the United States was drifting toward socialism. But Trump on Friday praised the attention surrounding their meeting, saying he had hosted world leaders who drew far less interest.

The two men announced no new policy agreements but signaled interest in working together on housing, affordability and crime. Mamdani noted that some New Yorkers who supported Trump in last year’s presidential election also voted for him, citing concerns about living costs. Trump agreed, saying, “Some of his ideas are the same ideas I have.”

By the end of the meeting, Trump even said he might consider returning to the city where he was born.
“Yeah, I would,” he said. “Especially after the meeting.”