TV networks cut away from Trump’s ‘most dishonest speech’ ever



Cable networks, broadcast networks and Twitter cut short their broadcasts of President Donald Trump’s speech from the White House briefing room Thursday; some outlets fact-checked the president’s unproven statements rather than carry them live.

Trump began his remarks by baselessly claiming that Democrats were committing “fraud” and trying to “steal” the election. “If you count the legal votes, I easily win,” the president said, even though the counting of legal votes is still happening. There are several key states, including Pennsylvania, Nevada, and Arizona, which are still tallying votes. Neither the president nor the Democratic nominee, former Vice President Joe Biden, has enough electoral college votes yet to win. Many of those votes are mail-in ballots, including from active military.

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MSNBC, ABC, CBS, CNBC, and NBC cut away from his speech. It's not the first time networks have opted not to carry Trump's remarks live; in March, several ended their live broadcasts of one of the president's briefings on the coronavirus, after he contradicted his own health experts. While there has been a great deal of focus on how social networks moderate election-related disinformation, there has been less scrutiny on TV news – and the clips it generates usually aren't moderated by the platforms, even if they contain disinformation.

Shortly after the president began speaking, MSNBC cut away to anchor Brian Williams. "Here we are again in the unusual position of not only interrupting the President of the United States but correcting the President of the United States," Williams said. "There are no illegal votes that we know of, there has been no Trump victory that we know of."

ABC cut away to anchor David Muir, who asked reporter Jon Karl to help "discern what he's talking about," adding there was "a lot to fact-check." Karl said there was "simply no evidence that's been presented in any of these states that there are illegal votes he is talking about something, making an allegation with absolutely no evidence whatsoever."

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CBS cut to anchor Norah O'Donnell and reporter Nancy Cordes for its own fact check. Trump's numbers dropped as more votes were counted, but as Cordes pointed out, that was what election analysts had expected. The president had told his supporters to vote in person; with in-person votes counted first, the president would appear to be ahead. Mail-in ballots, which would likely skew Democratic, would cause the numbers to shift. "There was no miracle there," she said.

On CNBC, anchor Shepard Smith said, "We're interrupting this because what the president of the us is saying in large part is absolutely untrue."

NBC News anchor Lester Holt said the president had made “a number of false statements, including the notion that there has been fraudulent voting. There has been no evidence of that,” he said.

CNN and Fox News continued to carry the speech live, but CNN reporter Daniel Dale, known for his rigorous fact-checking of the president’s statements, tweeted “I’ve read or watched all of Trump’s speeches since 2016. This is the most dishonest speech he has ever given.”

MSNBC reporter Hayes Brown tweeted that even Twitter had ended the live feed of Trump’s speech in its app, removing the “watch live” option. Twitter didn’t reply to a request for comment Thursday about why it decided to end the feed.

The president’s tweets also were getting fact-checked on Thursday; Twitter flagged eight of his nearly two dozen tweets as “potentially misleading. And both Facebook and TikTok blocked hashtags that were spreading misinformation about “stealing” the election.

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