

Even during coronavirus crisis, liberal media can't resist spreading lies



President Donald Trump speaks during a press briefing with the coronavirus task force. —AP

With much of the country now under quarantine, the nation desperately needs reliable information about the coronavirus. Unfortunately, politics has infected much of the mainstream media's coverage of the threat. Rather than taking their obligation to inform the public seriously, prestige outlets use each new development as a cudgel with which to beat President Trump.

On the heels of the president's announcement of a sweeping travel ban from other countries and declaration of emergency, a Sunday CNN chyron read: "Trump on Coronavirus: From 'Hoax' to National Emergency."

The trouble is that Trump never called the coronavirus a "hoax" — this is an inaccurate and misleading distortion of what he has said, created and propagated by major media. And CNN won't stop repeating it.

On Feb. 28, Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank tweeted out, "Remember this moment: Trump, in South Carolina, just called the coronavirus a 'hoax.'" The tweet has since been "liked" more than 162,000 times. Milbank subsequently wrote a column repeating the claim.

But anyone watching Trump's rally in the Palmetto State that day knows this wasn't what Trump said. "Trump said that when he used the word 'hoax,' he was referring to Democrats finding fault with his administration's response to coronavirus, not the virus itself," noted FactCheck.org, which generally leans left. Milbank was forced to update his column, noting "Trump said Saturday the 'hoax' referred to [was] Democrats' pinning blame for the virus" on him.

Milbank's misleading tweet is still up, however, shamelessly uncorrected.

Do a quick scan of social media, and the talking point that Trump called the coronavirus a hoax is still being spread far and wide, more than two weeks later. In fact, Joe Biden cut an ad this week repeating the false claim, prompting The Washington Post's fact-checker to slap the ex-veep with four Pinocchios for the ad. And Biden is the third Democratic candidate to make this "hoax" claim after dropouts Mike Bloomberg and Pete Buttigieg.

There's simply no excuse for CNN to still be repeating a false claim that happens to be a Democratic talking point. And this is just one example from a mountain of similar distortions; politically loaded errors have been a prominent feature of coronavirus coverage.

The Washington Post, for example, accused GOP Sen. Tom Cotton of fanning "the embers of a coronavirus conspiracy theory that has been repeatedly debunked by experts," namely that the Chinese may have engineered the virus in a lab. But as Cotton noted on Twitter, he was merely laying out one among several hypotheses about the virus' origin, including that the virus may have originated from a well-known biological testing facility in the Wuhan region — a possibility that can't be ruled out, even though Cotton admitted it was unlikely. The Washington Post appeared more determined to slap down GOP lawmakers for airing hypotheses than, you know, investigate the Beijing regime.

And The New York Times quoted anonymous sources to say the White House was "muzzling" Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. This prompted Fauci to cry fake news. "I have never been muzzled, ever, and I have been doing this since the administration of Ronald Reagan. I am not being muzzled by this administration."

The Trump administration isn't above criticism for how they've handled the coronavirus threat, and it's the media's job to hold them accountable when the president and his team fall short. But the media don't seem interested in real accountability at this critical moment — too often, major outlets have failed to report the truth because they seem more concerned with influencing November's election than making sure your family survives the next few months.

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