

Fox Corp. to pay \$787.5 million for pushing Trump election lies

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Fox Corp., the corporate owner of Fox News, agreed Tuesday to pay Dominion Voting Systems \$787.5 million to settle a lawsuit triggered by the broadcast on a massive scale of slanders claiming that the company's voting machines had switched votes from Donald Trump to Joe Biden in the 2020 election.

The settlement was the largest ever in a US lawsuit for defamation and comes to nearly 10 times the market value of Dominion, one of the main manufacturers of voting machines for US elections. The \$787.5 million is nearly equal to the total assets under management of the comparatively small hedge fund that owns Dominion.

The lies about Dominion were one of the central pillars of the "stolen election" propaganda campaign launched by Trump and his political entourage after his defeat in the 2020 election. Trump lawyers Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell were repeatedly given platforms by Fox hosts like Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and Laura Ingraham to spout their false claims against Dominion.

This campaign culminated in the organized assault on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, when a mob summoned to Washington by Trump marched from the White House and stormed the building, blocking for many hours the congressional vote to certify the Electoral College result showing Biden's victory over Trump by a margin of 306 to 232.

Fox's role in encouraging and inciting the first-ever attempt to overturn the result of a US election by force was not an issue in the lawsuit, but it shapes the response of both the corporate media and the political establishment. It no doubt contributed to the decision by Rupert Murdoch and his inner circle to settle rather than continue to fight a lawsuit they had bitterly contested right up to the day when opening arguments

were to be presented to a Delaware jury.

By settling, whatever the cost, Murdoch and his Fox News underlings avoided being put on the witness stand and compelled to give testimony that might go even further in exposing the inner workings of the principal media organ of the fascist right in America. They had already given sworn depositions to Dominion, but testifying in open court with massive media attention could have led to even more damaging revelations.

Murdoch and other top aides, as well as Carlson, Hannity, Ingraham and other fascistic "hosts," had already admitted that there was no evidence to support Trump's claims of a stolen election, and that they did not believe these claims during the period, from November 2020 through January 2021, when Fox programs were providing a platform for the non-stop propagation of these claims.

The initial attempt by Murdoch to suggest an arms-length relationship with Fox News programming decisions—despite the fact that his son Lachlan is the Fox Corp. CEO—was blown up by the release of emails and other messages in which Murdoch complained about the lack of evidence underlying the "stolen election" lies, but then gave permission for them to continue.

In sum, the settlement with Dominion amounts to an admission by the single largest US media empire that it systematically broadcast false statements about the 2020 elections, week after week, knowing that they were false. The obvious conclusion is that similar deliberate and massive lies are being broadcast today by the corporate media, not just about the 2020 elections, and not just by Fox News.

The settlement does not end the legal proceedings against Fox and other Trump allies relating to the

election lies. Dominion is also suing Newsmax and One America Network, right-wing media rivals of Fox whose ratings increases were a concern to Fox executives in the aftermath of the 2020 election. It is also suing several of the most aggressive proponents of the slander campaign over “vote-switching,” including Mike Lindell, CEO of MyPillow, and Trump lawyers Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell.

A second voting machines company, Smartmatic, is also suing Fox over the same lies on the same broadcasts, seeking damages of \$2.7 billion. Its suit was filed later and in New York courts, where it is moving to trial far more slowly. Smartmatic can use all the sworn depositions and court findings in the Dominion case as part of its suit.

The Fox News Network announcement of the settlement was brief, but packed with more lies and half-truths: “We are pleased to have reached a settlement of our dispute with Dominion Voting Systems. *We acknowledge the Court’s rulings finding certain claims about Dominion to be false.* This settlement reflects FOX’s continued commitment to the highest journalistic standards. We are hopeful that our decision to resolve this dispute with Dominion amicably, instead of the acrimony of a divisive trial, allows the country to move forward from these issues” [italics added].

The italicized sentence is the critical one. Fox does not even admit publicly that the claims that Dominion voting machines rigged the election were false, only that the court ruled that to be so (which could be challenged later). It does not say who made those “certain claims,” which were initiated by the Trump campaign but then voiced by Fox hosts and on Fox “news” broadcasts.

The stage for the settlement was set by the ruling issued by Superior Court Judge Eric M. Davis on March 22, which granted summary judgment to Dominion on the question of defamation—meaning that Fox could not argue that there was any truth to the claims of vote-switching—and on the question of publication—that Fox News Network, not only its show hosts, were responsible for the false statements, and that Fox Corp. and Rupert Murdoch, not just Fox News Network, shared this responsibility.

The company thus faced the prospect of going to trial in front of a jury in Delaware, Biden’s home state, deprived of its arsenal of legalistic smears and

diversions, with a judge who had repeatedly indicated his determination to compel in-person testimony by Murdoch and other top company officials and on-camera personalities.

In the end, the payout was less than one-fourth of the \$4.1 billion in cash-on-hand for the giant media corporation, whose annual revenues approached \$19 billion last year. Fox’s stock was down only slightly Wednesday, with Wall Street apparently agreeing that settling was cheaper than the continuing damage from the publicity over the case. One analyst cited in the media wrote, “it isn’t clear there has been much, if any, impact of these lawsuits on Fox News’s viewership and business,” and concluded, “The network remains a key growth driver for the overall company.”



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