# At CNN Town Hall, Trump defends January 6 coup, repeats election lies

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The CNN Town Hall Wednesday night provided a platform for Donald Trump to spew fascist rhetoric and flatly reject the slightest criticism of his four years in the White House, especially his actions on January 6, 2021, when his supporters attempted a coup against Congress to block certification of his defeat in the 2020 election.

The cable network chose to provide this forum—Trump's first live appearance on CNN since 2016—as part of an effort by new corporate executives to shift the network to the right and begin attracting some of the audience that is abandoning Fox News. New CEO Chris Licht has begun a systematic reworking of the network's line-up of afternoon and evening programs, including a purge of several prominent personalities, such as former headliner Don Lemon, falsely identified as "left."

The decision to host Trump's appearance before a friendly Republican audience at St. Anselm's College in Manchester, New Hampshire—vetted by the New Hampshire Republican Party—provoked widespread revulsion on social media, including from CNN's own staff.

Perhaps as part of an effort to strike a "non-partisan" pose, CNN's moderator for the event, correspondent Kaitlan Collins, made some effort to point out Trump's constant falsehoods and distortions, although they came at such a pace and volume that one commentator described them as a "firehose of lies."

The most important comments from the ex-president were his defense of the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol and his pledge to pardon many of those convicted of various crimes on that day. These range from violent assaults on police to seditious conspiracy—acting as agents of the plot to shut down Congress, stop the certification of Electoral College votes and keep Trump in the White House despite his election defeat.

Trump praised the fascist rioters. "They were proud. They were there with love in their heart," he said, then adding, "That was a beautiful day." Presumably that is why they erected a gallows outside the Capitol and chanted "Hang Mike Pence." The vice president had declined to accommodate Trump by engaging in an unconstitutional effort to reject slates of electors approved by the voters and send the choice back to Republican-controlled state legislatures.

Trump is still bitter about this, rejecting a suggestion that he owed an apology to Pence for endangering his life by a hostile tweet during the storming of the Capitol. "I don't feel he was in any danger," he said. Pence was the one who "did something wrong," he declared.

Trump blamed Nancy Pelosi for January 6, claiming that he had offered her 10,000 National Guard troops to protect the Capitol, but she had turned him down. This "offer" is entirely mythical. Moreover, he did not explain, nor did Collins ask, why he would offer troops to safeguard the Capitol on what was supposedly "a beautiful day."

The ex-president made it clear that his campaign in the 2024 presidential election would be based entirely on the lies about the "stolen" 2020 election. Asked by Collins whether he would commit himself to accept the results of the voting in 2024, he demurred, saying, "If I think it's an honest election, I would be honored to."

In other words, he would accept only an election in which he wins and returns to the White House—one that, in that case, could well be the last election to be held in America.

Collins repeatedly questioned Trump's lies about the "stolen election," but she never hinted at the

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more fundamental issue: Trump's drive to build a fascist movement to impose an authoritarian regime. His election denial was treated as just one political issue among many.

There were several other issues where Collins elicited statements from Trump that are sharply at odds with the consensus within the US ruling elite. On the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, Trump avoided answering the question of whether he favored a Ukrainian victory, instead adopting—for the present—a "humanitarian" posture, claiming he would bring the war to a halt as soon as he took office, and that his goal was to "stop the killing."

This position was widely attacked in the corporate media and by congressional Democrats and most Republicans. There is near-unanimity in the US ruling elite and its two parties on using the war in Ukraine to inflict a defeat on Russia and make it possible for the imperialist powers to carve up the largest component of the former Soviet Union. Trump limited the scope of his disagreement, and made no reference to the threat that the war could escalate into a nuclear cataclysm.

Trump was also out of step with the ruling class consensus on the danger of a default on US government debt, arising out of the congressional deadlock over raising the federal debt ceiling. When Collins noted the predictions that a federal default would devastate the financial markets and plunge the world economy into recession, the onetime billionaire real estate swindler airily waved off the prospect. "You might as well do it now because you'll do it later," he said, a forecast that might have been his only true statement of the night.

Asked about immigration, Trump defended the savage policies of his administration, including the deliberate separation of young children from their parents. He claimed that this was necessary as a deterrent to illegal border crossings.

Trump denounced E. Jean Carroll, the retired magazine columnist who the previous day had won a legal judgment in favor of her civil suit claiming that Trump sexually assaulted her in the mid-1990s. Carroll was awarded $5 million by a unanimous jury, for sexual abuse and defamation (the later charge based on Trump's vilifying her in response to the original lawsuit).

Asked about this, he added further defamation, calling Carroll a "whack job" and again claiming he did not know her, although Carroll's attorneys unearthed a photo of Carroll, Trump and their spouses at the time, posing for the camera.

The only issue which Trump treated with caution rather than provocation was abortion. He hailed last year's Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision, overturning *Roe v. Wade*, which he credited to the justices he had appointed during his presidency. But he declined to take a position on a federal law to ban abortion, and claimed to support "exceptions" for rape, incest and the life of the mother.

The Democratic response to this festival of reaction was to claim Trump's comments would be good for their election campaigns next year. Biden set the unserious tone, with a tweet going out in his name, reading: "It's simple, folks. Do you want four more years of that? If you don't, pitch in to our campaign."

There was no reference to Trump's evident threat to democracy, or to fascism, and much commentary portraying the event as a political bonanza for the Biden reelection campaign. This mirrors the unprincipled and reactionary posture adopted by the Democrats during the 2022 campaign, when they deliberately promoted the most right-wing, fascistic candidates in Republican primaries, in some cases actually funding their campaigns, with the claim that these candidates would be easier to beat in the general election.

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