

Trump Launches 'Vicious' Attack on Press

RTDNA warns members to watch their backs in wake of rhetorical lashing

BY JOHN EGGERTON

BETWEEN SPEECHES calling for unity and an end to divisiveness last week, President Donald Trump doubled down on his “us vs. them” attacks on the mainstream media, prompting the principal broadcast and cable journalism association to warn its members about protecting their safety.

At a campaign rally in Phoenix, Trump claimed his comments in the wake of an Aug. 12 rally and subsequent violence in Charlottesville, Va., widely criticized for drawing a false equivalency between racists and those who opposed them, were “perfect” and were misrepresented by media outlets he peppered with invectives, from the familiar “fake” and “dishonest” to “sick people” who were unpatriotic and turned a blind eye to violence.

But the media were quick to point out that it was Trump misreporting his own state-



President Donald Trump took aim at CNN, and drew applause and catcalls, at a rally in Phoenix.

ments, leaving out the “many sides” comments and “very fine people” characterization of some of those protesting with the neo-Nazis and racists — the parts of his statements that prompted the criticism.

The president mocked the small stature of ABC’s George Stephanopoulos, calling him “Little George;” slammed *The New York Times* as a failure; and referred to *The Washington Post* as the lobbying arm of Amazon.

He mocked CNN and stood by as the crowd booed the news outlet threateningly for perhaps half a minute.

Cable talking heads talked openly about a president unhinged and even delusional. Former Sen. Gordon Humphrey (R-N.H.) questioned Trump’s mental fitness, suggesting that Congress and the cabinet should seriously consider whether he was fit to serve. “He is not a well man,” Humphrey told CNN. “He believes in his own lies.” He said that, behind the scenes, some members of Congress agreed the president appeared mentally unfit.

The Radio Television Digital News Association said the speech contained his “most vicious attacks to date,” and also sounded a warning.

“As long as the person with the most powerful bully pulpit in the world continues to attack verbally

the news media, journalists are at risk,” RTDNA incoming executive director Dan Shelley said. “We urge reporters and photojournalists to be vigilant, and to take whatever steps they feel necessary to protect their personal safety while fulfilling their constitutionally guaranteed duty to seek and report the truth.”

It wasn’t just pundits and journalists who question Trump’s commitment to unity as well as his fitness for office.

According to a Quinnipiac University poll, conducted before the president’s latest exercise in calls for unity amidst divisive rhetoric, 62% of the respondents said Trump is doing more to divide than unite the country. As to his fitness, 61% said he was not honest and 68% said he is not “level-headed.”

In a separate *Politico*/Morning Consult poll, 53% of respondents said the president wasn’t moral, 55% said he wasn’t stable and 58% said he was reckless. ■

CABLE NETS GO BACK TO THE FUTURE

SEVERAL CABLE NETWORKS are going back to the future this fall by resurrecting high-profile, unscripted series franchises in an effort to lure back old fans as well as to bring in a new generation of viewers.

On Labor Day (Sept. 4), A&E will bring back its Emmy-winning *Biography* series after a five-year hiatus. The series, which aired in syndication before debuting on A&E in 1987 and ran on FYI (formerly Bio) through 2012, will again profile the lives of marquee entertainers and their impact on culture, executive VP and head of programming Elaine Frontain Bryant said.

The first installment of the new series, *The Notorious Life of Biggie Smalls*, chronicles the

slain hip-hop pioneer (see Watchman, page 6).

“Bringing back the Biography brand is so important for us,” Bryant said.

Also returning to the television stage in September is MTV’s *Unplugged*. The series, which first debuted in 1989, features musical acts playing their most popular songs on acoustic instruments and bows Sept. 8 with pop music star Shawn Mendes.

Later this year, Discovery Channel will offer a revival of game show *Cash Cab*, starring Ben Bailey, who originally drove the New York taxi that gave unwitting passengers an opportunity to win prizes during the show’s first run on the network from 2005-12.



Host Ben Bailey takes the *Cash Cab* wheel again.

Discovery Group president Rich Ross said the familiarity of reboots like *Cash Cab* gives such shows a leg up. “When you don’t have to resell a premise, it’s much easier to break through in a crowded environment,” he said. — R. Thomas Umstead

Reuters/Joshua Roberts

FATES AND FORTUNES EXEC MOVES OF THE WEEK

■ **(1) MARY BARRA**, the chairman and CEO of General Motors, has joined The Walt Disney Co.'s board of directors. The addition puts Disney's board at 12 members. Barra has served as chairman of GM's board of directors since January 2016. ■ Newly minted E.W. Scripps president and CEO **(2) ADAM SYMSON** has promoted five executives: **BRIAN LAWLOR** as president of local media; **LAURA TOMLIN** as senior VP of national media; **LISA KNUTSON** as executive VP and chief strategy officer; and **TIM WESOLOWSKI** and **WILLIAM APPLETON** as executive VPs. ■ **LINDA CARDENAS** has been tapped to head Hulu's viewer experience operations. She was previously senior VP of customer service at mortgage company SWBC. Her appointment follows the launch of Hulu's live TV service. ■ **(3) SHARON LEVY** has been named president of unscripted and scripted television for Endemol Shine North America. Levy comes aboard the company from Spike TV, where she was executive VP of original series.



THEY SAID IT

"I believe this issue actually unites conservatives and liberals. Conservatives like the idea of media diversity across the country; liberals don't like the idea of huge corporate conglomerates controlling news delivery and local programming."

— Chris Ruddy, Newsmax Media CEO, in an Aug. 23 interview with B&C, referring to the pushback to the proposed Sinclair Broadcast Group-Tribune Media merger.



THE WATCHMAN

Deputy editor Michael Malone's weekly look at the programming scene

'Narcos' Shifts on Netflix, and Biggie Still Notorious on A&E

THE NEW SEASON of *Narcos* arrives on Netflix Sept. 1. With Pablo Escobar dead and gone, season three focuses on the Cali Cartel. Executive producer Eric Newman describes the Cali cabal as "a more evolved species in the drug business" than Escobar's Medellín Cartel.

"Escobar stood against the system," Newman said. "Cali was the system."

Don't expect to see Escobar, who was played by Wagner Moura, in flashbacks. "His presence will be felt," Newman said. "But he won't be seen."

Newman is psyched to see *Narcos* shift so smoothly. "Going from Escobar to the Cali Cartel in a way that is satisfying to the audience — to see we pulled that off will make me really happy," he said.



Netflix's *Narcos*

The Cali Cartel will be the focus of season three, and that's it. Plenty of other drug gangs might merit the spotlight thereafter. "We're certainly not winning the drug war any time soon," Newman said. "We can go on a long time. I'll do this as long as they let me."

For another bit of rough and tumble programming, A&E offers up *Biggie: The Life of Notorious B.I.G.* starting Sept. 4. It's been 20 years since Biggie was murdered, and the film, marking the return of A&E's



Biography franchise, checks in with Puff Daddy, Biggie's widow Faith Evans and his mother, the charismatic Voletta Wallace, among others, for their insights on the famed Brooklyn rapper.

Biggie shows "the intimate side of Biggie," said director/executive producer Mark Ford. "I've rarely seen him portrayed through his own story."

Ford knew Voletta and Faith from his time producing VH1's *Behind the Music*, which tackled Biggie in 2001. The two are executive producers in the A&E project; Ford describes them as

"partners all the way."

He was a fan of *Biography*, which A&E ran repeats of in 1987, began producing new episodes for in 1990 and ended in 2012. "It was one of our competitors," Ford said. "I think I lost an Emmy to *Biography!*"

A&E gave Ford plenty of creative freedom. *Biggie* was initially supposed to run for two hours, but the rough cut was strong enough to have A&E say yes to three. "I'm thrilled to be the first film in this respected franchise," Ford said. "I hope the *Biggie* film sets the template."

The Notorious B.I.G. is the uncommon hip-hop legend whose music is still widely heard and appreciated. A trip to Bed-Stuy, Ford said, reminds one of Biggie's bigness. "You can't go two blocks without seeing his face somewhere," he said of the neighborhood's many murals.