


# Substantial Disruption



<https://www.substantialdisruption.com/>

## The Dark Secret of the Right-Wing Clustertuck

By Mike Tully

I refer to it as the “clustertuck.” It’s the phenomenon of right-wing media outlets working in concert to convince Americans to hurt themselves as well as to undermine our democracy. I named it after Fox News’ inflatable Tucker Carlson, its most notorious proponent.

Carlson and others have been spreading two dangerous lies: that the COVID-19 vaccine is a hoax and should be avoided, and that Joe Biden’s election in 2020 was fraudulent and he is an illegitimate president. The former has sickened and killed numerous Americans. The latter has sickened and threatens to kill American democracy.

Carlson [didn’t even wait for votes to be counted](#) to fire the first clustertuck election salvo. “The outcome of our presidential election was seized from the hands of voters,” he blustered, “where of course it rightly belongs, and now resides in the control of lawyers and courts and highly partisan, clearly corrupt, big city bureaucrats. So, no matter what happens next, that is a tragedy. Many Americans will never again accept the results of a presidential election.”

There was no basis for his accusations, but truth is not the currency of the clustertuckers. Carlson likely knew that Trump, who lost the popular vote in 2016 and never enjoyed a positive approval rating, would lose the election. Trump seemed to know it as well, given that he began attacking the validity of the election months before a single vote was cast. But they lied for different reasons. Trump wanted to stay in office. Carlson’s motivation was darker.

Carlson is also a leading clustertuck vaccine skeptic. “[So maybe it doesn't work](#),” he told his viewers on April 13<sup>th</sup>, “and they’re simply not telling you that.” On May 5<sup>th</sup> he told his viewers that the [COVID-19 vaccines killed more than 3,300](#) people in the U.S. during the previous four months, citing a source that is demonstrably invalid. In early July he denounced a Biden administration effort to have health care workers and volunteers go door to door to encourage unvaccinated individuals to get shots. He accused the administration of trying to “force people to take medicine they don’t want or need.” He called it “[the greatest scandal in my lifetime](#), by far.” What an amazing accusation from a man who routinely applies a flame-thrower to his coif!

Carlson is not the only storm-trooper in the clustertuck vaccine denial infantry. He is joined by many Fox News colleagues, including Brian Kilmeade, who bristled when his “Fox and Friends” co-host Steve Doocy said the federal government was trying to keep Americans from unnecessarily dying. “That is not their job,” [declared Kilmeade](#). “It’s not their job to protect anybody.” Kilmeade unwittingly hinted at the clustertuck’s dark secret.

Carlson has numerous fellow travelers advancing Trump’s stolen election lie. “But crucially,” [wrote Bill Keveney and Maria Puente in USA Today](#), “supportive media outlets amplified

(Trump's) claims, from wholehearted cheerleading on *Newsmax* and *One America News Network* (OAN) to credulous acceptance of gossamer-thin (and failed) legal challenges by Sean Hannity, among other Fox News commentators."

What motivates the clustertuckers? While they may want to perpetuate Trump's relevancy for political reasons, I don't believe their motivation has anything to do with politics or philosophy. Go back to Kilmeade's comment that it's not government's role to protect anybody. That statement is projection. What he meant was, "it's *not my job* to protect anybody." Kilmeade and the clustertuckers relish the prominence of media, but avoid the responsibility that goes with it.

When I taught Media Law and Regulation in the 1980s, I included a viewing of the movie version of "1984" My point was to emphasize how media can be dangerously weaponized by malicious actors. If I taught the course again, I would assign a viewing of the opening scenes of the movie, "[The Fisher King](#)."

In that movie, a talk show host named Jack Lucas, played by Jeff Bridges, took a call from a listener named Edwin. When the caller confessed a crush on a woman he met at what Lucas referred to as a "yuppy bar," Lucas went into a rant:

*They're repulsed by imperfection and horrified by the banal -- everything America stands for. Edwin, they have to be stopped before it's too late. It's us or them.*

Edwin replied, "Okay, Jack." A newscaster related what happened next:

*Edwin Malnick arrived at the peak hour of seven-fifteen, took one long look at the handsome collection of the city's best and brightest then removed a shotgun from his overcoat and opened fire. Seven people were killed before Mr. Malnick turned the gun on himself and shot a hole through his head.*

Jack Lucas might be the clustertucker poster child. He relished the power of media but disdained responsibility. He said crazy things because he could. He enjoyed it, listeners were attracted, and nothing mattered besides his success and self-satisfaction. It never occurred to him that a susceptible listener might take him seriously and do something horrible. I suspect that Carlson, Kilmeade and the others spout dangerous vaccine disinformation and sedition because they can, they enjoy the notoriety, and it makes them feel good. I doubt if they believe the election was stolen and the COVID-19 vaccine is a hoax. It's unlikely they expected their outbursts to get anybody hurt or killed.

But hundreds of thousands of Americans have died of COVID-19 and there was a violent insurrection on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Now that's a cluster(t)uck.