

TV chiefs tell Nixon: 'Prove it'

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NEW YORK — Executives of the three major television networks rejected yesterday President Nixon's charge that they have been vicious and unfair in covering his domestic problems.

"I am very sorry it all started up again. I had thought it had gone away," said NBC News President Richard C. Wald. "I honestly feel the President is making a mistake — the old mistake of blaming the messenger for the message."

CBS News President Richard Salant said, "We are familiar, of course, with all of our own news broadcasts, as well as those of other networks. And we are convinced that none of the network reporting justifies the adjectives the President used Friday night."

At ABC, news chief Elmer Lower said, "We stand on the record of ABC News for fairness and balance. We have never knowingly broadcast anything false."

In his news conference Friday night, Nixon said that in 27 years of public life "I have never seen such outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting . . ." He specifically referred to television, and added:

" . . . When people are pounded night after night with that kind of frantic, hysterical reporting, it naturally shakes their confidence."

NBC News anchorman John Chancellor said that the charges Nixon made at his news conference demanded proof.

Dan Rather, the CBS White House correspondent, agreed, and said he wanted to know the particular instances that Nixon was referring to.

In response to a question from Rather Friday night about what went through his mind when he heard talk of impeachment, Nixon said:

" . . . Mr. Rather, you may remember that when I made the rather difficult decision of my first term on Dec. 18, the bombing of, by B-52s of North Vietnam, that exactly the same words were used on the networks — I don't mean by you, but they were quoted on the networks — that were used now, tyrant, dictator, he's lost his senses, he should resign, he should be impeached."

"I'd like to know on what network broadcast and by whom," Rather said in a telephone interview. Of Nixon's charges regarding network reporting, he said, "I simply do not believe that it is true."

"I do want to emphasize that it is not my intention to get into a shouting match with the President," Rather said. "What is frantic and hysterical depends on your point of view and your own condition."