

# Trump asks for unity, but presses hard line on immigration

By Peter Baker

President Trump delivered a message of bipartisan unity on Tuesday night in his first address to Congress in the new era of divided government, but signaled that he would continue to wage war for the hard-line immigration policies that have polarized the capital and the nation.

In a nationally televised speech that toggled between conciliation and confrontation, Trump presented himself as a leader who could work across party lines even as he pressed lawmakers to build a wall along the nation's southwestern border that leaders of the newly empowered congressional Democrats have adamantly rejected.

"We must reject the politics of revenge, resistance and retribution, and embrace the boundless potential of cooperation, compromise and the common good," the president said. "Together, we can break decades of political stalemate. We can bridge old divisions, heal old wounds, build new coalitions, forge new solutions and unlock the extraordinary promise of America's future."

Any hopes for a newfound spirit of cooperation, however, seemed elusive as the president and Democrats spent the hours before, during and after the address exchanging partisan political fire, making clear that ritualistic calls for across-the-aisle collaboration were unlikely to transform an environment that has turned increasingly toxic.

Republicans jumped to their feet at the president's calls to curb immigration, limit late-term abortions and ensure that the United States does not turn to socialism, even chanting "U.S.A. U.S.A." a couple of times as if at a Trump campaign rally. "That sounds so good," he exulted.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, sitting behind Trump for the first time, and other Democrats largely remained in their seats without applauding and expressed only tepid enthusiasm even for his mention of goals intended to appeal to them, like infrastructure and paid parental leave. Pelosi maintained a polite, even amused smile on her face for much of the speech.

But the evening was filled with political theater as the president introduced World War II veterans, Holocaust survivors, the Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin, a 10-year-old cancer survivor, a police officer shot seven times at last fall's synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh and the teary-eyed relatives of a couple killed by an illegal immigrant, all sitting with the first lady, Melania Trump.

The change in the power structure in a Capitol long dominated by men was on display as Pelosi and scores of House Democratic women wore white, the color of the suffrage movement, reflecting the fact that 131 women were sworn into the new Congress, the most in American history.

When Mr. Trump noted this breakthrough, the women leapt to their feet, cheering, dancing and high-fiving each other. "That's really great," he said. "Congratulations."

He made no direct mention of the issues that may yet come to dominate the year, such as the Russia investigation by the special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III, or the parallel inquiries that House Democrats intend to conduct into his campaign's ties with Russia and efforts to impede investigations.

Instead, he alluded to them only in passing, but pointedly. "An economic miracle is taking place in the United States," he said, "and the only thing that can stop it are foolish wars, politics or ridiculous partisan investigations."

But Trump indicated no retreat from his almost singular pursuit of a border wall, directly taking on Pelosi, who has called it "immoral." He devoted 15 minutes of the hour-and-22-minute speech to immigration with no concession to Democratic priorities like a path to citizenship for immigrants brought into the country illegally as children.

"This is a moral issue," Trump said as Pelosi sat unmoved behind him. "No issue better illustrates the divide between America's working class and America's political class than illegal immigration," he added. "Wealthy politicians and donors push for open borders while living their lives behind walls and gates and guards."

In the official Democratic response,



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Stacey Abrams, who lost a close race for governor of Georgia in November, scorned the idea of unity from a president who has practiced the politics of division. "We know bipartisanship could craft a 21st-century immigration plan," she said, "but this administration chooses to cage children and tear families apart."

Abrams, who is African-American, challenged Trump's history of racial provocation, saying, "We must hold everyone from the highest offices to our families accountable for racist words and deeds and call racism what it is — wrong."

The president's speech, built on a theme of "choosing greatness," came at a pivotal moment halfway through the president's term as he seeks to regain momentum after the midterm election defeat that handed control of the House to Democrats and after his failed effort to use a partial government shutdown to extract money for the wall.

Stung by his retreat on the government shutdown, Trump has hardly been in the mood for collaboration with the other party. As he and his team drafted his address in recent days, he has groused about the text, complaining that it was too gentle on Democrats, according to people briefed on the matter.

The president insisted on sharpening some of the lines in the speech and rebuffed aides, who urged him to congratulate Pelosi on her ascension to the speaker'ship.

During an off-the-record lunch for television anchors on Tuesday before the speech, Trump offered scathing assessments of a number of leading Democrats, including some lining up to run against him next year.

He dismissed former vice president Joseph R. Biden Jr. as "dumb," called Senator Chuck Schumer of New York a "nasty son of a b\*\*\*\*," and mocked Gov. Ralph

Northam of Virginia, who he said "choked like a dog" at a news conference where Northam tried to explain a racist yearbook photograph, according to multiple people in the room.

Democrats did not wait for the address to pan it. "It seems every year the president wakes up and discovers the desire for unity, then the president spends the other 364 days of the year dividing us, and sowing a state of disunion," Schumer said on the Senate floor. He added, "The blatant hypocrisy of this president calling for unity is that he is one of the chief reasons Americans feel so divided now."

Trump fired back at Schumer via Twitter. "I see Schumer is already criticizing my State of the Union speech, even though he hasn't seen it yet," the president wrote. "He's just upset that he didn't win the Senate, after spending a fortune, like he thought he would. Too bad we weren't

given more credit for the Senate win by the media!"

Trump arrived at this point in his presidency with the approval of just 37 percent of the public, according to Gallup. In the past four decades, the only times a president headed into a State of the Union address with as little or less support were in 1983 when Ronald Reagan was struggling with a painful recession and in 2007 and 2008 when George W. Bush was trying to turn around the Iraq war.

Trump is the only president in the history of Gallup polling to have never drawn the support of a majority of the public at any point in his first two years in office. But while he is the fourth president in a row to lose at least one house of Congress during a midterm election, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama both bounced back to win reelection, and Trump has privately expressed confidence that he will, too.

After presidents suffer setbacks in mid-

terms, they often reach out to the victorious opposition with words of conciliation, however artificial or short-lived they may be. In Trump's case, he opened this period of partisan power sharing with a relentless confrontation over his proposed border wall, resulting in a record-breaking 35-day partial government shutdown.

That impasse nearly cost Trump his opportunity to deliver his State of the Union address, as Pelosi refused to let him come to the House chamber as long as federal agencies were closed and workers unpaid. Trump backed down and accepted a measure reopening the government for three weeks, but negotiations in the interim have made no progress toward winning money for his wall — and the government could close again on Feb. 15.

Given that, Trump's calls for unity were almost surely destined to fall on deaf ears. Even Republicans have publicly rebuked him lately for his plans to withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan, and party leaders have pressed him not to declare a national emergency bypassing Congress to build the wall.

Among those invited by the president to join the first lady during the speech was Jenna Trump, a sixth-grade student from Wilmington, Del., who "has been bullied in school due to his last name," according to the White House.

Democrats were making points with their guests, as well. Among those they invited were air traffic controllers who went unpaid during the government shutdown, illegal immigrants who worked at Trump's properties, and transgender soldiers who will be banned under the president's new policy.

In his address, Trump assailed Democrats like Northam for comments in support of easing restrictions on late-term abortions and called for federal legislation cracking down on such procedures, a nod to Trump's conservative base. He made no mention of the racist medical school yearbook pictures that has threatened Northam's political career, after aides cautioned him about raising that issue.

Trump also sought to frame the opposition Democrats as too extreme, suggesting that the country was in danger of a socialist takeover. "Here in the United States, we are alarmed by new calls to adopt socialism in our country," he said, as Republican lawmakers booed. "We are born free and we will stay free. Tonight we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country."

The president highlighted what he sees as the accomplishments of his first two years in office, including a growing economy, rising energy production, increased military spending, deregulation and tax cuts. He pressed Congress to approve his new trade pact with Canada and Mexico updating the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Trump did not outline the traditional laundry list of new initiatives, the way other presidents have, but he did plan to make a national commitment to end transmission of the virus that causes AIDS, with a goal of stopping its spread in the United States by 2030. He repeated past calls for bipartisan measures to rebuild "America's crumbling infrastructure," curb the cost of prescription drugs and approve paid parental leave.

The president also talked about his goal of bringing an end to the "endless wars" in places like Syria and Afghanistan, and his bid to force President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela to step down. He announced that he would meet for the second time with North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, in Vietnam on Feb. 27-28 to seek his nuclear disarmament.

Trump ended his address with an uncharacteristic effort at poetry, an ode to America and its common purpose. "I am asking you to choose greatness," he said. "No matter the trials we face, no matter the challenges to come, we must go forward together."

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\*Peter Baker is a writer for The New York Times, from which the above article was taken.

## State of the Union fact check:

### What Trump got right and wrong

President Trump appeared in front of a joint session of Congress for the annual address. Here is how his remarks stacked up against the facts.

President Trump leaned hard on the strength of the American economy during his second State of the Union address on Tuesday, but with a blend of precise statistics and gauzy superlatives that are much more difficult to measure.

He also returned to a theme that dominated the second year of his presidency — a quest for a border wall with Mexico to cope with what he said is a crisis of crime and drugs in the United States caused by illegal immigration.

The two issues dominated his address, which in tone was more measured than his biting Twitter feed, but in substance contained numerous claims that were false or misleading.

Here is what Trump said and how it stacked up against the facts.

#### The economy

"The US economy is growing almost twice as fast today as when I took office, and we are considered far and away the hottest economy anywhere in the world."

This is false.

The American economy expanded at an annual rate of 3.5 percent in the third quarter of 2018. Growth in Latvia and Poland was almost twice as fast. Same for China and India. Even the troubled Greek economy posted stronger growth. And a wide range of economic analysts estimate that the growth of the American economy slowed in the fourth quarter, and slowed even further in the first month of 2019.

"We recently imposed tariffs on \$250 billion of Chinese goods — and now our Treasury is receiving billions and billions of dollars."

This is true.

Since Trump imposed tariffs on certain imports from China — and imported steel and aluminum from around the world — federal tariff revenues have increased. Revenues from customs duties, which include tariffs, rose by \$13 billion in the third quarter of 2018 compared with a year earlier, the Commerce Department reported. Technically, that money is paid by Americans who bring the goods across the border, and it is often passed on to American consumers in the form of higher prices.

"We have created 5.3 million new jobs and importantly added 600,000 new manufacturing jobs — something which almost everyone said was impossible to do, but the fact is, we are just getting started."

This is false.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that since January 2017, when Trump took office, the economy has added 4.9 million jobs, including 454,000 jobs manufacturing jobs. Far from being "impossible," that is closely comparable to the pace of job creation during some two-year periods during the Obama administration, and significantly slower than the pace of job creation in manufacturing in the 1990s.

"Wages were 'growing for blue-collar workers, who I promised to fight for. They are growing faster than anyone thought possible.'"

This is true.

Wages are rising faster for construction and manufacturing workers than workers in service occupations, according to the Labor Department. "More people are working now than at any time in our history."

#### This is misleading.

While the total number of people working in the United States is higher than ever, it is not because of the president's policies. It is because more people than ever live in the United States.

#### Immigration

"The border city of El Paso, Tex., used to have extremely high rates of violent crime — one of the highest in the entire country, and considered one of our nation's most dangerous cities. Now, immediately upon its building, with a powerful border in place, El Paso is one of the safest cities in our country."

This is false.

El Paso was never one of the most dangerous cities in the United States, and crime has been declining in cities across the country — not just El Paso — for reasons that have nothing to do with border fencing. In 2008, before border barriers had been completed in El Paso, the city had the second-lowest violent crime rate among more than 20 similarly sized cities. In 2010, after the fencing went up, it held that place.

"As we speak, large, organized caravans are on the march to the United States."

This is exaggerated.

At the end of January, a new caravan of thousands of migrants from Central America-Canada Agreement, does include provisions that are intended to bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States — like minimum wage provisions for some auto manufacturing. But some economists have said those provisions could ultimately push more manufacturing — and jobs — outside North America. The deal does allow American farmers to sell more dairy products to Canada. But the trade pact has yet to be approved by Congress, and both Democrats and Republicans say that is unlikely to happen without significant changes.

"I hope you can pass the USMCA into law, so we can bring back our manufacturing jobs in even greater numbers, expanding American agriculture, protecting intellectual property, and ensuring that more cars are proudly stamped with the four beautiful words: Made in the USA"

This is false.

The revised trade deal with Canada and Mexico, known as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, does include provisions that are intended to bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States — like minimum wage provisions for some auto manufacturing. But some economists have said those provisions could ultimately push more manufacturing — and jobs — outside North America. The deal does allow American farmers to sell more dairy products to Canada. But the trade pact has yet to be approved by Congress, and both Democrats and Republicans say that is unlikely to happen without significant changes.

#### Foreign policy

"If I had not been elected president of the United States, we would right now, in my opinion, be in a major war with North Korea."

There is no evidence.

In 2016, at the end of the Obama administration, there was no sign that the United States and North Korea were about to go to war, though Pyongyang had been conducting nuclear tests and Obama had continued economic sanctions. In Trump's first year in office, he increased tensions with North Korea by attacking its leader, Kim Jong-un, in a series of Twitter posts, which prompted hostile statements from Pyongyang. Trump wrote that North Korea's actions would be met with "fire and fury" and called Kim "Little Rocket Man."