

## **Trump Says In State Of The Union Speech That Investigations Into His Presidency Are Hurting The Economy**

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U.S. President Donald Trump warned on Tuesday that investigations into his presidency, including a probe into Russian election interference that continues to ensnare his associates, are hurting the American economy.

In a State of the Union address to both houses of Congress on Tuesday, Mr. Trump also renewed his demand for a wall on the country's southern border – warning that, without it, hordes of criminals are pouring into the country and taking Americans' jobs.

He attacked Democrats who embrace socialism as favouring “government coercion,” graphically took aim at people who support a woman's right to abortion and reiterated his call for U.S. troops to leave the Middle East.

Coming three months after the Democrats took the House of Representatives from his party, and two weeks after the end of a month-long government shutdown over his wall demand, Mr. Trump opened the speech with a call for bipartisanship. He offered to work with Democrats on rebuilding America's infrastructure and efforts to reduce prescription drug prices – both policy areas where he is largely aligned with the opposition party.

But he rapidly pivoted to a broadside at his rivals.

“If there is going to be peace and legislation, there cannot be war and investigation,” he cautioned legislators early in the address. “It just doesn't work that way.”

Mr. Trump said the growing economy was under threat from “ridiculous partisan investigations.”

The President's campaign team has been under investigation for nearly two years by Special Counsel Robert Mueller. Several of the President's associates have been charged criminally, and some have pleaded guilty.

The Democratic majority in the House of Representatives is also expected to launch further probes, including into Mr. Trump's tax returns and business dealings. His message Tuesday appeared to suggest that if Democrats want help advancing their legislative priorities, they should not investigate his administration.

Mr. Trump devoted the largest section of his speech to arguing for the wall, for which he wants US\$5.7-billion from Congress. The demand puts him on a collision course with Democrats and heightens the likelihood of another shutdown: The President wants the wall funded as part of a spending deal that must be reached by the middle of this month. Speaker Nancy Pelosi has described the wall as “an immorality.”

Mr. Trump maintained that the U.S. needs to build a steel barrier across the border to stop an influx of drugs, human trafficking rings and cheap labour. The President also blamed undocumented immigrants for bringing more crime to the country.

Research has regularly found that unauthorized immigrants typically commit less crime than native-born Americans – one Cato Institute study from last year, for instance, showed a clear gap in conviction rates in Texas between the two groups. U.S. law enforcement has also said that drugs coming into the country overwhelmingly come through legal ports of entry rather than gaps in border protection.

“Now is the time for the Congress to show the world that America is committed to ending illegal immigration and putting the ruthless coyotes, cartels, drug dealers, and human traffickers out of business,” Mr. Trump said. “Where walls go up, illegal crossings go way down.”

The President also claimed Democrats favour “open borders.” Democratic leaders have actually offered to negotiate increased funding for border security. They only oppose Mr. Trump’s wall.

In the Democratic response to the speech, Stacey Abrams, a former Georgia state legislator, took aim at the undercurrent of intolerance in much of Mr. Trump’s rhetoric.

“We need him to tell the truth and to respect his duties and respect the extraordinary diversity that defines America,” said Ms. Abrams, who drew national attention last year when she came within two percentage points of winning the reliably Republican state’s governorship. “Our progress has always been found in the refuge, in the basic instinct of the American experiment.”

The President largely ran a victory lap on trade. He called on Congress to ratify the new U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement – which he said would bring factory jobs back from Mexico by ensuring more cars are made in the U.S. The free-trade deal was reached last year, but its passage is uncertain, with Democrats demanding labour provisions be toughened and Republicans calling for Mr. Trump to drop steel and aluminum tariffs on Canada and Mexico. And he bragged that tariffs on China are bringing in large sums of money for the U.S. Treasury, but did not mention that the costs of his tariffs are largely paid by American businesses and consumers.

He also demanded lawmakers pass legislation banning some types of abortions, which he described as allowing a baby to be “ripped from the mother’s womb.”

After a section condemning Venezuela’s dictatorial government, Mr. Trump attacked recently elected left-wing Democrats who favour socialism, which he described as “government coercion, domination and control.”

And Mr. Trump reiterated his promises to end American military involvement in Syria and Afghanistan, where the U.S. is negotiating with the Taliban. A break from Republican orthodoxy, Mr. Trump’s approach to foreign military involvement dovetails with his overall program to dial back the U.S.’s international commitments and focus on a more nationalistic realpolitik.

“It is time to give our brave warriors in Syria a warm welcome home,” Mr. Trump said. “Great nations do not fight endless wars.”