

# STL NEWS

## STATES TOP LEADING NEWS

### AP Fact Check: Trump's Shift On Concrete Wall, Tariff Myth

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January 28, 2019

January 27, 2019— Forced to back down on a government shutdown, President Donald Trump is shifting his story regarding his campaign promise to build a border wall. He's also once again inflating the number of immigrants in the U.S. illegally.

The president insists he never proposed a concrete wall, promoting instead a “see-through” barrier made of steel. That's a change on how he talked in the past. He repeatedly pledged in 2016 to build a “big beautiful wall” and have Mexico pay for it, conjuring up images of an imposing, “concrete plank” structure along America's southern border, too tall and strong for anyone to climb over.

On his claim that at least 25 million immigrants are in the U.S. illegally, Trump is contradicted by his own Homeland Security secretary and other sources.

The government has reopened for three weeks while Trump tries again to persuade Congress to approve \$5.7 billion to build segments of border wall.

His retreat in the partial shutdown capped a head-spinning week in which Trump also repeated questionable assertions that a border wall would stop crime and drugs from “pouring in,” declared that the remains of U.S. service members are “back home where they belong” from North Korea even though that mission already has run into a roadblock, and exaggerated economic performance under his presidency.

A look at the rhetoric and the facts:

#### TARIFFS

**TRUMP:** “We have billions of dollars coming into our treasury — billions — from China. We never had 10 cents coming into our treasury; now we have billions coming in.” — remarks at a meeting with Republican lawmakers Thursday.

**THE FACTS:** This is wildly off base. The notion that the U.S. suddenly has revenue coming in from tariffs, thanks to his trade war, defies history that goes back to the founding of the republic. President George Washington signed the Tariff Act into law in 1789 — the first major act of Congress — and duties from imports were a leading source of revenue for the government before the advent of the modern tax system early in the 20th Century. Tariffs on goods specifically from China are not remotely new, either. They are simply higher in some cases than they were before.

Tariffs are a decidedly modest portion of revenue in modern times and Trump has not changed that with the escalation of his trade dispute with China. Customs and duties generated \$41.3 billion in revenues last year, up from \$34.6 billion in 2017 (far more than 10 cents). That \$6.7 billion increase occurred in part because of the president's tariffs. But it amounted to just 0.16 percent of federal spending.

Moreover, tariffs are taxes paid largely by U.S. business and consumers, not foreign countries.

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## ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

TRUMP: "There are at least 25,772,342 illegal aliens, not the 11,000,000 that have been reported for years, in our Country. So ridiculous! DHS." — tweet Sunday.

THE FACTS: It's not that high, according to his own Homeland Security secretary as well as independent estimates.

The nonpartisan Pew Hispanic Center estimates 10.7 million immigrants were living in the U.S. illegally in 2016, the most recent data available. Advocacy groups on both sides of the immigration issue have similar estimates.

At a House hearing last month, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen acknowledged the number was "somewhere" between 11 million and 22 million, lower than Trump's 25 million.

Trump has previously asserted there were 30 million to 35 million here illegally.

According to Pew, the number of immigrants in the U.S. illegally had reached a height of 12.2 million in 2007, representing about 4 percent of the U.S. population, before declining in part because of a weakening U.S. economy.

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## THE WALL

TRUMP: "These barriers are made of steel, have see-through visibility, which is very important. ... We do not need 2,000 miles of concrete wall from sea to shining sea. We never did. We never proposed that. We never wanted that, because we have barriers at the border where natural structures are as good as anything that we can build." — remarks Friday in Rose Garden.

THE FACTS: Actually, he did pledge a wall made of concrete along the southern border. It's true he did not say there needed to be 2,000 miles of it.

For example, in a Jan. 18, 2016, speech in New Hampshire, Trump said: "No windows, no nothing, precast concrete going very high.

Let's see about concrete going very high."

In an Aug. 11, 2016, speech in Florida, he said, "The politicians would come up to me, and they'd say, 'You know, Donald, you can't build the wall.' I said, 'You have to be kidding. You have to be kidding. Concrete plank, you have to be kidding. Precast, precast, right? Boom. Bing.

Done. Keep going."

He referred again to a concrete wall in a Jan. 11, 2018, interview with the Wall Street Journal, even while signaling those plans might change, saying: “If you have a wall this thick and it’s solid concrete from ground to 32 feet high, which is a high wall, much higher than people planned. You go 32 feet up and you don’t know who’s over here. You’re here, you’ve got the wall, and there’s some other people here. ...I can understand why I have to have see-through.”

And as recently as Dec. 31, Trump suggested a concrete wall was still being considered, tweeting, “An all concrete Wall was NEVER ABANDONED.”

Trump now commonly refers to the wall he promised as “steel slats” or “steel barriers.”

Regarding the wall’s length, Trump has noted as far back as 2015 that it need not run 2,000 miles, because natural barriers would account for some of the border distance. And former Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly told lawmakers in 2017 that it would not be “from sea to shining sea.”

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TRUMP: “What’s happening is the drugs are pouring in. And, yes, they come through the ports of entry, but the big trucks come through areas where you don’t have a wall and you have wide-open spaces ... They’re loaded up with drugs.” — remarks Thursday in meeting with Republican lawmakers.

THE FACTS: His suggestion that a wall would stop most drugs from “pouring” into the U.S. defies his government’s findings on how the illegal substances get in. Most of it is smuggled through official border crossings, not remote stretches of the border.

The Drug Enforcement Administration says “only a small percentage” of heroin seized by U.S. authorities comes across on territory between ports of entry. The same is true of drugs generally.

In a 2018 report, the agency said the most common trafficking technique by transnational criminal organizations is to hide drugs in passenger vehicles or tractor-trailers as they drive into the U.S. through entry ports, where they are stopped and subject to inspection. They also employ buses, cargo trains and tunnels, the report says, citing other smuggling methods that also would not be choked off by a border wall.

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TRUMP: “Walls work ... We really have no choice but to build a powerful wall or steel barrier.” — remarks Friday in Rose Garden.

TRUMP: “Without a Wall it all doesn’t work.” — tweet Thursday.

THE FACTS: There is no clear evidence how well border walls or other barriers actually work.

The Government Accountability Office, Congress’ auditing arm, reported in 2017 that the government does not have a way to measure how well barriers deter illegal immigration from Mexico.

Despite \$2.3 billion spent by the government on such construction from 2007 to 2015, the GAO found that authorities “cannot measure the contribution of fencing to border security operations along the southwest border because it has not developed metrics for this assessment.”

Few people dispute that barriers can contribute to a drop in crossings. When barriers were built in the Border Patrol's Yuma, Arizona, sector in the mid-2000s, arrests for illegal crossings plummeted 94 percent in three years. When barriers were built in San Diego in the 1990s and early 2000s, arrests fell 80 percent over seven years. But both areas also saw sharp increases in Border Patrol staffing during that time, making it difficult to pinpoint why illegal crossings fell so dramatically.

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TRUMP: "BUILD A WALL & CRIME WILL FALL!" — tweet Sunday.

TRUMP: "BUILD A WALL & CRIME WILL FALL! This is the new theme, for two years until the Wall is finished (under construction now), of the Republican Party. Use it and pray!" — tweet Wednesday.

THE FACTS: His assertion is at odds with several studies that found immigration does not lead to increased crime. Trump's claim that his border wall is under construction is also misleading.

Multiple studies from social scientists and the libertarian think tank Cato Institute have found that people in the U.S. illegally are less likely to commit crime than are American citizens, and legal immigrants are even less likely to do so.

A March study by the journal *Criminology* found "undocumented immigration does not increase violence."

The study, which looked at the years 1990 through 2014, said states with bigger shares of such people have lower crime rates.

As well, a study in 2017 by Robert Adelman, a sociology professor at University of Buffalo, analyzed 40 years of crime data in 200 metropolitan areas and found that immigrants helped lower crime.

On construction of a wall, no new miles of barrier construction have been completed under Trump. Existing fencing has been replaced or strengthened in a few areas. It's true that many miles of barrier are in service — about 650 miles (1,050 kilometers) of fencing — but that was done by previous administrations.

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## NORTH KOREA

TRUMP: "The Fake News Media loves saying 'so little happened at my first summit with Kim Jong Un.' Wrong! After 40 years of doing nothing with North Korea but being taken to the cleaners, & with a major war ready to start, in a short 15 months, relationships built, hostages & remains ... back home where they belong, no more Rockets or M's being fired over Japan or anywhere else and, most importantly, no Nuclear Testing." — tweets Thursday.

THE FACTS: Trump is exaggerating progress with North Korea and overstating what's been done to return the remains of U.S. soldiers who fought in the Korean War in the 1950s.

In August, the North sent to the U.S. 55 boxes that were said to contain American war remains from North Korea. The U.S. has yet to say whether those remains are exclusively of U.S. soldiers

and how many are in those boxes. As of Jan. 15, just three have been positively identified. Meanwhile, North Korea has refused to begin negotiations with the Pentagon on terms for recovering and returning any of the thousands of additional remains.

Trump is correct that North Korea has stopped test-firing missiles and conducting nuclear tests. But North Korean leader Kim has not denuclearized or even agreed to a plan in which the North would give up its nuclear weapons and the means to produce more.

At the Trump-Kim summit last June in Singapore, the leaders agreed to “work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.” Their joint statement did not define that term or commit the North to any particular action.

The Pentagon said in a report this month on its plans to expand U.S. global defenses against missile attack that “while a possible new avenue to peace now exists with North Korea, it continues to pose an extraordinary threat and the United States must remain vigilant.”

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## ECONOMY

TRUMP: “The economy is doing great. More people working in U.S.A. today than at any time in our HISTORY.” — tweet Thursday.

THE FACTS: It’s true that more people are working now, but that is because of population growth. A more relevant measure is the proportion of Americans with jobs, and that is still far below record highs.

According to Labor Department data, 60.6 percent of people in the United States 16 years and older were working in December. That’s below the all-time high of 64.7 percent in April 2000, though higher than the 59.9 percent when Trump was inaugurated in January 2017.

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TRUMP: “The Economy is one of the best in our history, with unemployment at a 50 year low, and the Stock Market ready to again break a record (set by us many times) – & all you heard yesterday, based on a phony story, was Impeachment. You want to see a Stock Market Crash, Impeach Trump!” — tweet Jan. 19.

THE FACTS: The economy is healthy but not one of the best in history. Also, there are signs it is weakening after a spurt of growth last year.

The economy expanded at an annual rate of 4.2 percent in the second quarter last year. That was the best showing under Trump and the highest in four years. In the late 1990s, growth topped 4 percent for four straight years and even reached 7.2 percent in 1984.

Almost all independent economists expect slower growth this year as the effect of the Trump administration’s tax cuts fade, trade tensions and slower global growth hold back exports, and higher interest rates make it more expensive to borrow to buy cars and homes.

The stock market reached a record high in early October when the Dow Jones industrial average topped 26,000, but markets have fallen and are not about to break records. The Dow closed at 24,737 on Friday.

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WHITE HOUSE: “President Trump is delivering on his promise to bring back American manufacturing. ... Manufacturing added 284,000 jobs in 2018, the most added in a year since 1997.” — information sheet on Trump’s first two years in office, tweeted Wednesday by Trump.

THE FACTS: It’s true that 2018 was the best year for factory employment since 1997, but that mostly illustrates how much more is needed to “bring back” manufacturing. There are now 12.8 million factory jobs in the U.S. That less than the 13.7 million that existed just before the 2008-2009 Great Recession and far below the 17.6 million in 1997, the last time annual factory job growth was higher.

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WHITE HOUSE: “President Trump’s pro-growth policies are unleashing economic growth .... Due to President Trump’s pro-growth policies, real gross domestic product growth exceeded 3 percent over the last four quarters.” — information sheet on Trump’s first two years in office.

THE FACTS: That’s correct as to the level of GDP, but it doesn’t suggest growth has been “unleashed” at a spectacular rate. The 3 percent growth in the year ending in the third quarter is just the fastest since the second quarter of 2015, when it reached 3.4 percent, and below the 3.8 percent reached in the first quarter of 2015.

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## CLINTON EMAILS

TRUMP, referring to Hillary Clinton: “Remember July 4th weekend when Crooked went before FBI & wasn’t sworn in, no tape, nothing?” — tweet Thursday.

THE FACTS: He is right that Clinton wasn’t put under oath for her FBI interview and that no tape recording was made. But that’s the standard procedure the FBI uses for questioning people, famous or not, and who, like Clinton, agree to be interviewed and aren’t in custody.

The same procedures would almost certainly apply if Trump himself ever submitted to an in-person interview with special counsel Robert Mueller’s team of investigators.

The concept of swearing in a witness typically applies to courtroom or congressional settings, as opposed to more informal voluntary interviews. But it’s ultimately a meaningless distinction because it’s a crime no matter the circumstances to lie to the FBI.

Trump is wrong to suggest there’s no record of Clinton’s interview with the FBI on July 2, 2016. The FBI, again per standard protocol, produced a typed-up document summarizing the main points of the interview. The bureau later released it, giving more transparency to the process than it typically provides.