



Trump delivered a schizophrenic State of the Union address: levelheaded on Venezuela, unhinged on Mexico

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President Trump's State of the Union address may go down in history as a textbook case of political schizophrenia: He spoke like a levelheaded statesman about Venezuela — and an unhinged racist demagogue about Mexico.

In his annual address before Congress on Tuesday, Trump shamelessly repeated his lies about immigration to persuade us that Mexicans remain “bad hombres” who invade this country, kill people and steal Americans' jobs. That's baloney, aimed at pleasing his xenophobic base.

During his speech, Trump presented Heather Armstrong, whose relatives were killed by an undocumented immigrant.

“Few can understand your pain,” Trump said, speaking to her. “But I will never forget ... Not one more American life should be lost because our nation failed to control its very dangerous border.”

That was racist fear-mongering at its worst. Most studies agree that undocumented immigrants on average commit much fewer violent crimes than U.S.-born Americans.

A Cato Institute case study in Texas found that the criminal conviction rate per 100,000 residents was of 899 for undocumented immigrants, 611 for legal immigrants, and 1,797 for native-born Americans.

Why didn't Trump introduce one of the thousands of relatives of victims of U.S.-born mass shooters in the United States, many of whom had semi-automatic weapons because of his refusal to support gun laws?

Why didn't he even mention the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, that left 17 people dead last year? Or the 58 people killed and almost 500 injured in late 2017 by the Las Vegas mass shooter, who was also born and raised in the United States?

Trump's claim that there is an “urgent national crisis” on immigration is a fantasy. In fact, illegal immigration has fallen over the past decade. The number of unauthorized immigrants declined from 12.2 million in 2007 to 11.3 million today, according to the nonpartisan Pew Research Center.

And Trump's case for spending \$5.7 billion of taxpayers' money to build a wall along the border — he originally promised that Mexico would pay for it — is ludicrous: Nearly half of undocumented immigrants don't enter the country by sneaking across the border; they come through airports or other legal entry points as tourists and overstay their visas, Pew Research Center studies show.

When it came to Venezuela, however, Trump struck the right tone.

He cited his recognition of Juan Guaidó as the country's legitimate president — drawing applause from both sides of the aisle — and lashed out against “the brutality of the Maduro regime.” But Trump wisely stayed away from empty threats of a U.S. military intervention in Venezuela. I was afraid that he would repeat the White House's most recent statements that “all options are on the table,” which have given precious propaganda ammunition to Maduro's dictatorship.

Maduro is presenting himself as a victim of U.S. “imperialism” and claims the United States is about to invade his country to take its oil reserves. But in reality, he is trying to shift the focus of the conversation from his disastrous policies — which have caused Latin America's biggest humanitarian crisis in recent memory — into a U.S.-Venezuela confrontation.

To his credit, Trump's words during his address were courageous and measured. Still, they would have been more helpful in the restoration of democracy if he had cast the United States as part of a wider coalition of major democracies around the world pushing for free elections in Venezuela.

Granted, this was an address, read from a teleprompter, for which Trump's speechwriters and advisers crafted every sentence.

But it would be great if, when he returns to his routine of tweeting and making fiery speeches to his supporters, we would see the statesmanlike Trump who spoke about Venezuela, and not the fear-mongering racist who spoke about Mexico.

I'm not holding my breath, but dreaming is free.