



Donald Trump Gave His First Speech in Front of a Joint Congress

He covered health care, immigration reform, education, and more

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March 1, 2017

On Tuesday night, Donald Trump gave his first presidential speech to both chambers of Congress, touching on health care, immigration reform, education, and military spending and operations over the course of his hour-long address, which he kicked off with a call for “unity and strength.”

Before the speech, Trump told Fox News that he hoped to better communicate his policies to the American people — poor communication, he felt, was responsible for some of his job disapproval ratings. Congressional Republicans were hoping to receive more guidance and plans from Trump in terms of how to proceed with some of their biggest projects, like repealing and replacing Obamacare, coming up with tax reforms, and finalizing a federal budget.

What did Trump address during his speech, and did it clarify his message for both Congress and the public? Here were his main talking points.

1. He said Obamacare needs to be replaced but didn’t offer up specifics.

When it came to health care, Trump remained steadfast in his previous promises to repeal Obamacare and replace it with a different plan. He said his new plan would “expand choice, increase access, lower costs, and at the same time provide better health care,” and he also listed some potential features, including:

- Americans with preexisting conditions would have access to coverage.
- There would be a stable transition for Americans already enrolled in the health care exchanges (AKA Obamacare).
- Americans would pay for their own coverage through transactions such as tax credits.
- Trump would give state governors the flexibility they need with Medicaid, a state and federal program for people with low incomes.

- People could purchase health insurance in different states, which Trump said would create a competitive national marketplace.

Trump provided more details for his health care reform plan than he had previously, but there was still no word on how he would be able to guarantee all those features for his plan and get it through Congress, especially as the Republican majority continues to disagree on a replacement plan.

2. He said he was creating a new office to track crimes committed by immigrants.

Audible disapproval was heard during the address when Trump announced that the Department of Homeland Security would form an organization called VOICE, which stands for Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement. “We are providing a voice to those who have been ignored by our media and silenced by special interests,” he said.

Trump, however, continued to provide no evidence that immigrants were behind a significant portion of violent crimes in the United States; in addition, CNBC reported that violent crime rates have decreased over the past two and a half decades. On the flip side, as the Cato Institute pointed out, immigrant populations have had no effect on the violent crime rates in America. In some cases, violent crime rates may be even lower among immigrant populations than among U.S.-born citizens.

3. He advocated for school-choice policies.

Trump began the education section of his speech by calling it the “civil rights issue of our time.”

He then went on to highlight the story of Denisha Merriweather, a student who used a special tax-credit scholarship in Florida to attend a private school, as a way to advocate for school choice. School choice is a controversial education policy that allows parents and students to decide where children should attend school. Supporters say it gives more options to families on how their kids will be taught, while opponents argue that it weakens the public school system, negatively impacts students from marginalized communities, and doesn’t necessarily improve student outcomes.

4. Trump talked about defending the nation from “radical Islamic terrorism.”

Trump said that there was a “beachhead of terrorism” in the U.S., particularly “radical Islamic terrorism.” The president backed up his claims by saying that research from the Department of Justice found that the “vast majority of individuals convicted for terrorism-related offenses since 9/11 came here from outside of our country.”

However, Trump’s claims aren’t necessarily true. ABC News reported that a Department of Justice study found that 580 people were convicted of terrorism-related offenses between September 11, 2001, and December 31, 2014; however, they weren’t broken down by country of origin. Instead, then senator Jeff Sessions created his own categorization of the people on that list, saying that 380 of them were from outside America.

The Cato Institute, however, debunked Sessions’s methodology and called it flawed.

There was additional controversy concerning Trump's phrasing of "radical Islamic terrorism," as his brand-new national security adviser, H. R. McMaster, specifically told him not to use the wording, as he found it "unhelpful," according to an aide. Trump, obviously, didn't follow that advice.

5. Trump claimed he would fix the economy.

Trump didn't dive too far into specifics of his job-creation and economic policies, saying he had his team working on a "historic tax reform" and that he was going to deregulate businesses and the economy to help the American people and American business.

He also went back to his earlier slogan about "buying and hiring American," which is ironic considering that many of Trump's products are made overseas.

6. He honored the soldier who was killed in the Yemen raid he ordered.

During the first week of his presidency, Trump approved a raid in Yemen that ended with the death of a Navy SEAL named Ryan Owens. Owens's widow attended the address, where she received a standing ovation from the chamber, which Trump said "broke a record."

However, Trump also said during his address that the raid that killed Owens was "highly successful" and "generated large amounts of vital intelligence," a claim that U.S. officials debunked the day before to NBC News. Moreover, Trump refused to take responsibility for Owens's death and said his generals were to blame, a taboo for presidents, who usually take responsibility for military deaths.