



Trump talks unity but offers no olive branch

Addy Baird

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President Donald Trump paid lip service to unity and bipartisanship during his second State of the Union address Tuesday night. But he put forth no solution to the divisive problem facing the country later this month: another potential government shutdown.

Trump used the bulk of his address to mislead the country about immigration and border security, economic development and criminal justice, abortion and foreign policy. He inexplicably claimed credit for preventing a war with North Korea and for putting record numbers of women and minorities to work.

He preached harmony while ignoring his own penchant toward acrimony.

“We must reject the politics of revenge, resistance and retribution and embrace the boundless potential of cooperation, compromise and the common good,” Trump told a joint session of a deeply cleft Congress. “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.”

Just minutes later, Trump railed against investigations — which he has tried to prevent — into whether his campaign conspired with Russia during the 2016 election.

“An economic miracle is taking place in the United States — and the only thing that can stop it are foolish wars, politics or ridiculous partisan investigations,” he said. “If there is going to be peace and legislation, there cannot be war and investigation.”

But he said little that would halt the partisan battles tearing apart Washington and the nation. Time and again, Trump talked about immigration — his go-to, red-meat issue and the one that caused the government to shut down in December and January.

“Simply put,” Trump said, “walls work and walls save lives. So let’s work together, compromise, and reach a deal that will truly make America safe.”

So far, neither the president nor the Democrats who control the House have indicated a compromise is at hand.

It’s a familiar story: Ahead of Trump’s 2018 State of the Union address, the White House said the speech would focus on unity and bipartisanship. “Tonight, I call upon all of us to set aside our differences, to seek out common ground, and to summon the unity we need to deliver for the people we were elected to serve,” the president said a year ago.

But he's hardly heeded his own advice.

Most recently, Trump prompted a record-breaking government shutdown because Congress would not provide \$5.7 billion for a wall on the southern border. Late last year, the administration instituted a policy of separating migrant families at the border. The president has continued his practice of insulting Democrats, the media, his fellow Republicans and even his own intelligence community, often using his Twitter account as a true bully pulpit. A New York Times analysis, updated in late December, has tracked more than 550 people, places, and things Trump has insulted on Twitter since launching his presidential campaign.

This year looks to be no different. Hours before his address Tuesday, Trump sparred with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer.

"It seems every year the president wakes up and discovers the desire for unity on the morning of the State of the Union, then the president spends the other 364 days of the year dividing us, and sowing a state of disunion," Schumer said Tuesday afternoon on the Senate floor. "The blatant hypocrisy of this president calling for unity is that he is one of the chief reasons Americans feel so divided now."

Trump shot back on Twitter, writing, "I see Schumer is already criticizing my State of the Union speech, even though he hasn't seen it yet. 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!"

In a lunch with television anchors Tuesday, Trump called former Vice President Joe Biden "dumb," Schumer a "nasty son of a bitch," and mocked Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam (D) for "choking like a dog" at a recent press conference in which the governor tried to distance himself from a racist yearbook photo, The New York Times reported.

Tuesday's State of the Union comes as Washington is in limbo, just 11 days after a record-breaking government shutdown. Trump has threatened to shut the government down again on February 15 if lawmakers do not pass legislation that includes \$5.7 billion in funding for a border wall.

And yet, with less than two weeks before funding runs out again, Trump repeated xenophobic arguments about immigration, while ignoring real pressing issues, such as climate change and domestic terror.

Immigration

"We are removing... gang members by the thousands, but until we secure our border, they are going to keep streaming right back in," Trump said.

But gang members and terrorists are not, in fact, streaming over the border.

In recent months, Trump has claimed that 4,000 suspected "terrorists" came across the border last year. But as NBC News reported in January, only 41 people cited on CBP's Terrorist Screening Database were stopped along the southern border between October 2017 and March

2018. Of that number, only six were categorized as “non-U.S. persons.” The remainder were U.S. citizens or legal U.S. residents.

Trump has also repeatedly claimed that immigrants are inherently criminal, but multiple studies have proved that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes or join gangs than native-born Americans. In fact, a 2015 study by the libertarian Cato Institute found that native-born Americans commit crimes at more than double the rate of undocumented immigrants, and a study published by academic journal *Criminology* last year concluded that cities with higher proportions of undocumented immigrants do not have higher crime rates than cities with fewer immigrants.

In truth, Trump is responsible for creating a humanitarian crisis on the border. In December, two young children died in Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody, and just last week, the administration said in a court filing that reuniting thousands of migrant children who were separated from their families at the border may not be “within the realm of the possible.”

Far-right terrorism

While Trump railed against immigrants, he did not mention a word about the increased threat from far-right terrorists.

In the two years since Trump took office, white nationalists have committed a number of serious attacks in the United States, including the murder of Heather Heyer at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017, the anti-Semitic mass shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue last October, and the murder of 19-year-old Blaze Bernstein by the neo-Nazi terror group Atomwaffen. According to the Anti-Defamation League’s 2018 report, far-right extremists were responsible for 98 percent of domestic extremist murders in the U.S. in 2018.

Nevertheless, the Trump administration, has repeatedly ignored the threat posed by the far right. Just days before the Pittsburgh shooting, for example, the administration pulled funding from the Department of Homeland Security’s Countering Violent Extremism Program, which allocated \$10 million for regional law enforcement agencies to tackle the far right.

Trump’s rhetoric has also helped galvanize the far right. In October, Cesar Sayoc, an ardent Trump supporter, sent a spate of pipe bombs to CNN, former President and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and liberal mega-donor George Soros, all frequent targets of Trump’s tweets. Canadian mass shooter Alexandre Bissonnette, who attacked a Quebec City mosque in January 2017, killing six, searched Trump’s Twitter feed more than 400 times.

Criminal Justice

“America is a nation that believes in redemption,” Trump said Tuesday night, pointing to two formerly incarcerated people, Alice Johnson and Matthew Charles, who were guests of First Lady Melania Trump at the speech.

But Trump did not talk about police-community relations, nor did he talk about the fact that people of color are disproportionately affected by police violence and the criminal justice system

at large. The Washington Post reported that of the 998 people shot and killed by police officers in 2018, 229 were black.

The killings of several black men by law enforcement galvanized national attention. Botham Jean was murdered in his own apartment by a Dallas police officer who said she thought she was entering her own home. Stephon Clark was shot in his grandmother's Sacramento, California, backyard; police said they thought his phone was a gun.

Diante Yarber was killed by police in a Walmart parking lot in Barstow, California, after officers decided Yarber and his vehicle were "deemed suspicious." The police department refused to release any video or answer calls from the family's lawyer. Harith Augustus was killed on a busy sidewalk while he tried to explain to police that he was carrying a firearm on his hip. He did not draw the gun. Antwon Rose was killed in Pittsburgh while running from police.

Just last month, former Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke, who was convicted of second-degree murder for killing Laquan McDonald in 2014, was sentenced to less than a decade in prison. Three other officers charged with conspiring to cover for him by falsifying reports about the killing were acquitted on all charges.

Meanwhile, former Attorney General Jeff Sessions accused Black Lives Matter activists, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and anti-fascist activists of inciting murder.

"If you want more shootings and death, then listen to the ACLU, Black Lives Matter, or Antifa," he told an audience of police in Waukegan, Illinois, last year. "If you want public safety, then listen to the police professionals who have been studying this for 35 years."

Health care

Trump did find some tiny semblance of unity in the House chamber when he addressed health care.

"The next major priority for me, and for all of us, should be to lower the cost of health care and prescription drugs — and to protect patients with pre-existing conditions," he said. "Already, as a result of my administration's efforts, in 2018 drug prices experienced their single largest decline in 46 years."

That much is correct. As Politico reported last month, drug prices have increased at the slowest rate since 1973.

And the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has taken small steps to reduce costs, including fast-tracking generic drug approvals. But some experts worry that could put the health of patients at risk. Additionally, HHS has proposed outlawing Medicare and Medicaid rebates, which could lead to premium increases.

Drug makers, meanwhile, are reporting massive profits, thanks in large part to the Republican tax bill passed in late 2017. And earlier this year, 60 pharmaceutical companies hiked drug prices.

Congress did recently pass two major pieces of legislation to address the opioid crisis, another issue Trump made central to his campaign. Though the laws take steps in the right direction, experts say they are not enough.

The epidemic is complicated and massive. Fentanyl has made overdoses deadlier, and an increasing number of deaths involve benzodiazepines, drugs traditionally prescribed for anxiety, insomnia, or seizures. Experts say Congress needs to tackle the underlying problem of addiction and make treatment more accessible, not less, as consistent attempts by Republicans in Congress to undermine — or repeal — the Affordable Care Act have.

Another health care crisis has gotten less attention: The U.S. maternal mortality rate has doubled over the past two decades, making the United States an outlier in the developed world.

Every year in the United States, between 700 and 900 women die during pregnancy — and tens of thousands more nearly lose their lives — due to complications from pregnancy or childbirth. Black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women.

Last December, Congress passed the Preventing Maternal Deaths Act, which Trump later signed into law, but activists say that steps need to be taken to address the specific dangers posed to black women.

Climate change

Trump ignored entirely the issue of climate change.

During his time in office, Trump has often claimed that the United States has the “cleanest water” and “cleanest air,” his Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rolled back Obama-era clean water rules in December and eased mercury and air toxics standards just last month. The Trump administration has also tried to roll back car emission standards, and his top EPA officials have consistently downplayed the link between air quality and health concerns. Meanwhile, greenhouse gas emissions saw their biggest worldwide jump in 2018, increasing by 2.7 percent.

Trump has also repeatedly claimed that he ended the war on “clean coal,” despite the fact that clean coal doesn’t exist. Additionally, despite Trump’s many claims that he’s bringing back the coal industry in the United States, more coal plants have shut down during his first two years in office than during former President Barack Obama’s entire first term.

Trump’s appointees have repeatedly done the bidding of the industries they are supposed to regulate. Acting EPA administrator Andrew Wheeler, for example, is a former top lobbyist for coal giant Murray Energy. Documents obtained by the Sierra Club, under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), revealed Wheeler, as deputy administrator and then acting administrator, took more than 50 meetings with companies or industry groups the EPA regulates between April and August of last year, and he was instrumental in easing mercury and air toxics standards last month, a boon to polluters.

The Trump administration has also eliminated protections for 3.3 million acres of protected land.

Economy

Trump often brags that unemployment has dropped and the economy has strengthened during his tenure, but economists attribute the improvements to changes begun under former President Barack Obama.

Additionally, the overall participation of 25- to 54-year-olds in the job market is down from its 1999 peak, according to The Center for American Progress. (ThinkProgress is an editorially independent outlet housed at the Center for American Progress Action Fund.)

Trump has repeatedly pointed to declining unemployment among African Americans — a claim he reiterated Tuesday night — but according to the Economic Policy Institute, that rate has been steadily falling since 2011 and has not gained momentum since Trump took office. The median net worth of black households still remains low, at about \$17,000, compared to about \$171,000 for white households, according to a 2017 report from the Federal Reserve.