



Trump uses baseless fear-mongering in his State of the Union speech to push for a border wall

Rebekah Entralgo

February 5th, 2019

President Donald Trump reiterated calls for a physical barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border during his State of the Union address Tuesday night, linking immigration with crime and repeating much of the same divisive rhetoric and misinformation that prompted the 35-day partial government shutdown in December.

While the president did not officially call for a national emergency at the southern border, as some predicted he might do, he continued to frame the situation at the border as a crisis, in order to convince Congress to allocate \$5.7 billion dollars for the wall, suggesting the country faced imminent danger if lawmakers failed to act ahead of the next February 15 shutdown deadline.

“Republicans and Democrats must join forces again to confront an urgent national crisis,” Trump said Tuesday night. “Congress has 10 days left to pass a bill that will fund our government, protect our homeland, and secure our Southern Border.”

“The lawless state of our Southern Border is a threat to the safety, security and financial well-being of all Americans,” he added.

The president is somewhat correct in saying that the border is in a state of crisis, but much of the current chaos can be linked back to the administration’s own immigration policies, which have threatened the ability of Central American refugees to rightfully seek asylum. Whether by separating thousands of immigrant families at the border or forcing asylum seekers to wait out their cases in Mexico, the Trump administration has made the lawful act of seeking refuge in the United States a punishable offense.

Trump on Tuesday framed those harsh policies as “moral” because they were supposedly drafted with the lives of immigrant women and children in mind.

“Tolerance for illegal immigration is not compassionate — it is cruel,” Trump said. “One in three women is sexually assaulted on the long journey north. Smugglers use migrant children as human pawns to exploit our laws and gain access to our country. Human traffickers and sex traffickers take advantage of the wide open areas between our ports of entry to smuggle thousands of young girls and women into the United States and to sell them into prostitution and modern-day slavery.”

The president failed to mention that many of the women and children traveling north from Central America face even greater risks in their countries of origin. El Salvador had the third-

highest rate of violent deaths of women in the world in 2015, while Honduras ranked fifth. Even after they arrive at the border, they potentially face abusive conditions at unlivable detention centers.

The president drudged up another favorite talking point Tuesday night, claiming without proof that immigrant women were being kidnapped and driven in cars across the border.

The claim is such a popular talking point with the president that he mentioned it 10 times over a 22 day period, according to The Washington Post.

“Human traffickers and sex traffickers take advantage of the wide open areas between our ports of entry to smuggle thousands of young girls and women into the United States and to sell them into prostitution and modern-day slavery,” he said Tuesday night.

Previously, he has claimed that traffickers were “grabbing women [and children], taping them up, wrapping tape around their mouths so they can’t shout or scream, tying up their hands behind their back and even their legs and putting them in a back seat of a car or a van — three, four, five, six, seven at a time.”

It’s a compelling anecdote no doubt, but one rooted in fiction. Most immigration experts have no idea what Trump is referring to and even Border Patrol officials were sent scrambling last month to find “any information” to support the claim.

“I think his statements are completely divorced from reality,” Ashley Huebner, associate director of legal services at the National Immigrant Justice Center told the Post. “That’s not a fact pattern that we see.”

(Some have even suggested Trump may be pulling these claims straight from the movie *Sicario 2: Day of the Soldado*, a 2018 film about the Mexican drug cartel where prayer rugs, jet-fueled getaway cars, and women gagged with tape, all make an appearance.)

The president attempted to prove this myth recently, tweeting a video in which he spoke about the dangers of immigrants binding women and children with duct tape and trafficking them across the border in places where there was no wall, using grainy black and white footage of immigrants at the border. However, that footage appears to have come from a series of CBP cameras near border towns like Yuma, Arizona, and features groups of immigrant families and individuals from Central America, trying to cross the border. All were intercepted by CBP agents and processed; none were identified immediately as traffickers.

CBP declined to comment on the video.

In his State of the Union speech Tuesday night, Trump also claimed the “wide open areas between our ports of entry” have allowed for “tens of thousands of innocent Americans [to be] killed by lethal drugs that cross our border and flood into our cities — including meth, heroin, cocaine and fentanyl.”

Trump's multi-billion dollar wall, however, would not stop immigrants and drugs from entering the United States because vast majority are trafficked through legal ports of entry.

As [ThinkProgress](#) previously noted, "Cocaine seizures on U.S. borders...regularly measure in tons, making it impractical to have individual migrants ferry it across. Instead, dealers prefer to smuggle drugs into the country via legal ports of entry, which allow them to bring in high-value substances that are more easily hidden."

Even without using ports of entry, experts like Sanho Tree, the Director of the Institute for Policy Studies' Drug Policy Project, say a wall would do nothing to stop drugs from making their way into the United States, as many smugglers use elaborate tunnel systems to transport their product.

"[To effectively smuggle drugs across a the border as Trump suggests], you would need to line up a huge number of humans and march them across the desert where their heat signature can be picked up. If you had a tunnel why would you risk this inefficient line of smuggling?" Tree said in January, speaking to ThinkProgress.

The majority of Trump's remarks on immigration Tuesday night attempted to paint immigrants as criminals more broadly.

"Not one more American life should be lost because our nation failed to control its very dangerous border," he said, pointing to a number of his invited guests, which included the family of a couple who were burglarized and murdered by an alleged undocumented immigrant in Reno, Nevada last month.

Cherry-picking violent cases to paint all immigrants as criminals is not a new tactic for Trump. During his first State of the Union address, Trump told the story of two families from Long Island, New York whose children were murdered by members of MS-13.

However, multiple studies have refuted the common Republican refrain that more non-white immigration equals more crime.

A 2015 study by the libertarian [Cato Institute](#) found that the rate at which native-born Americans committed crimes in Texas was a little more than double the rate of undocumented immigrants. And a study published by [Criminology](#) last March similarly concluded that cities with a higher population of undocumented immigrants do not experience higher rates of violent crime.

Despite these facts, the Trump administration has used this false narrative to justify the recent surge in arrests of non-criminal immigrants in the United States. In the first 14 months of the Trump administration, 58,010 undocumented immigrants without criminal convictions were arrested — a 203 percent increase from the final 14 months of the Obama administration.