



9 things you should know before Trump starts spewing lies in Tuesday address to the nation

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Tuesday evening, President Donald Trump will speak to the American people about his demands for a southern border wall, which have led him to shut down the government. He will, undoubtedly, gin up fear about a “crisis” mounting at the US-Mexico border. Here are nine things you should know in advance of his speech — incidentally, nine things that I wish Trump would correctly acknowledge in his speech, too.

After all, Trump has been hyping fears about violence stemming from the United States/Mexico border since the early moments of his presidential campaign. In June 2015, for instance, he painted an ugly picture of Mexican migrants crossing the border. “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists,” Trump said. He has kept up his fearmongering about the border, but ramped it up in recent weeks as justification for his sudden decision to shutdown the federal government because neither Democrats nor Republicans in his own party will approve funding for Trump’s border wall. He has tweeted about “our VERY DANGEROUS SOUTHERN BORDER” and even threatened to declare a state of emergency to build the wall that he insists is not only needed but is also needed now more than ever.

Trump is simply, on these and related points, incorrect. Here are the key facts:

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Trump turned the border wall into his Alamo. That didn't end well and this won't either.

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In 2000, 1.6 million people were apprehended trying to cross the southern border into the United States. In 2001, 1.3 million were apprehended. In 2018? Less than 400,000. That’s not just a decline. It’s a significant decline.

A lot of the decline was because of the recession, which dried up jobs migrants were seeking to fill. But if we’re being fair, apprehension numbers reached a low of about 310,000 in 2017 in part because of increased border enforcement and fear of Trump and his anti-immigrant policies.

According to data from the Wilson Center, as summarized by The Washington Post, “The crime rates in U.S. border counties are lower than the average for similarly sized inland counties, with two exceptions out of 23 total.”

Anti-immigrant conservatives like to talk about how undocumented immigrants are supposedly menacing border communities and making border states less safe. Recently, in a segment with me on CNN, conservative radio host and Trump supporter Ben Ferguson shouted, “Talk to people in Texas! I’m in Texas right now! People here ... have been killed by illegal immigrants that come across the border illegally. And you say it’s fearmongering!?”

Yes, I do. And I’m not the only one. Christopher Wilson, deputy director of the Wilson Center, told The Post, “There is no doubt the U.S. side (of the border) is a very safe place.”

The majority of immigrants in the USA without authorization first entered the country legally, and then overstayed their visas. The Center for Migration Studies said in a 2017 report that crossing the border is not the way “the large majority of persons now becoming undocumented.” It reported that two-thirds of undocumented immigrants entered the U.S. legally and then simply overstayed their visas. If you legitimately are concerned about the issue of undocumented immigrants, as opposed to just exacerbating and exploiting fearmongering for political gain, then this is where you would focus — not the border.

In an interview on Fox News this weekend, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders insisted that “nearly 4,000 known or suspected terrorists come into our country illegally, and we know that our most vulnerable point of entry is at our southern border.” Sanders' careful wording suggests she knew she was more than bending the truth. Fox News anchor Chris Wallace fact-checked Sanders: “Do you know where those 4,000 people come, where they are captured? Airports.”

“The state department says there hasn’t been any terrorists found coming across the southern border,” Wallace stated. But Sanders kept pressing the lie, because Trump’s anti-immigrant agenda relies on fact-less fearmongering.

If you care about facts, it’s important to distinguish between illegal border crossings and migrants lawfully presenting themselves at southern ports of entry in order to apply for asylum. The simple fact is that large groups of very visible migrants, such as the main so-called migrant caravan of people fleeing violence in Central America, are obviously not trying to “sneak” across the U.S. border. They’re coming to the border to apply for asylum, which was a completely transparent and lawful process until Trump started changing the rules.

Trump has suggested that the flow of heroin into the United States would be stanching by his border wall. He’s right that 90 percent of heroin enters through the southern border. However, according to the Drug Enforcement Agency, “illicit drugs are smuggled into the United States in concealed compartments within passenger vehicles or commingled with legitimate goods on tractor trailers.”

In other words, a wall wouldn’t stop most heroin from entering the country. And arguably, resources spent on the wall would divert from other enforcement mechanisms, such as more officers and technology at ports of entry to scan vehicles for drugs.

It’s also noteworthy that in ramping up prosecution of migrants trying to enter the United States, the Trump administration actually reduced prosecution of drug traffickers. Last June saw the fewest such prosecutions in two decades.

What apparently began as a memory device to help the undisciplined Trump remember what to thunder about during campaign appearances has turned into a central bone the president won't let go of. But there's a reason Trump couldn't get funding for his wall during the past two years of his presidency when his own party completely controlled both houses of Congress: They didn't want it. The New York Times reports that leading anti-immigration activists are concerned Trump's focus on the "relatively ineffectual" wall is distracting from other strategies they would like prioritized.

For instance, Republican Rep. Will Hurd, from the border state of Texas, said in 2017, "I've made it clear time and time again that building a physical wall from sea to shining sea is the most expensive and least effective way to secure the border." The conservative Cato Institute has called Trump's wall idea "impractical, expensive and ineffective." One might suspect that more Republicans would speak out against Trump's stupid wall idea if they weren't afraid of alienating the right-wing GOP base.

The U.S.-Mexico border is 1,933 miles long. Of that, 34 percent already has a wall or a fence — in particular, parts along the areas of the border that are most easily accessed by people traveling by car or on foot. That's right, there's already a wall along 654 miles of the U.S. border. What's the rest? Huge mountains and rivers and vast stretches of land that are privately owned, which the United States would have to seize through eminent domain if Trump got his way. Mind you, those areas aren't completely open — they're actively patrolled using sensors and drones and other technology, the sorts of things experts say actually work.

Here it's worth noting that the less than 400,000 people who were trying to cross the border in 2018 were arrested. They were caught and detained and deported. Because of our already extremely highly militarized and aggressive border patrol efforts.

"The people of our country want it," Trump said recently. No, they do not. A mid-December poll found that 54 percent of respondents opposed Trump's wall. That number even crept up slightly by late December. And more than two out of three Americans don't think the wall should be a political priority. It's also worth noting that most Americans blame Trump for the government shutdown that he initiated by trying to hold government funding hostage to get his stupid wall.

Americans don't support Trump's wall because they know the truth — that we have a tough immigration and border enforcement system already working, and way bigger problems to focus on fixing in our nation.