

The Boston Globe

The Grinch, the wall, and the high cost of Trump's ineffective border policy

Indira A.R. Lakshmanan

December 26, 2018

Spare a thought for President Trump, whose increasing isolation, petulant policy-making, and casual cruelty to everyone from federal employees and children who believe in Santa to refugees fleeing for their lives make it hard not to think of Dr. Seuss' Grinch who stole Christmas because "his heart was two sizes too small."

While much of America was counting blessings or struggling to make ends meet, Trump put coal in the stockings of hundreds of thousands of federal workers whose paychecks are held hostage over his demand that Congress make taxpayers pay \$5 billion for a wall that the president wrongly claimed Mexico would pay for.

Next came an unwanted Christmas Eve delivery for everyone with stocks, mutual funds, retirement or pensions invested: markets plummeted in the wake of the shutdown, the president's announcement of yanking troops from Syria, the resignation of the defense secretary in protest, and uncertainties over trade and interest rates. The Dow Jones fell 650 points, a Christmas Eve record (it rebounded Wednesday); the NASDAQ is in a bear market and the S&P 500 is down 20 percent since August. Trump furiously took to Twitter, blaming the Federal Reserve Bank.

When a little girl calling Santa's "flight path" hotline was connected to the president, maybe Trump was still angry, because it sounded as if he was trying to ruin her holiday magic. "Are you still a believer in Santa?" he asked, while cameras rolled. "Because at 7, it's marginal, right?"

For two days, Trump sat in the White House seemingly alone and isolated, having a bitter Twitter meltdown over his self-inflicted government shutdown, and throwing himself a plaintive pity party: "I am alone (poor me) in the White House," he tweeted.

Trump compulsively trashed the Fed chairman he appointed; dragged his outgoing defense secretary, Jim Mattis, and anti-ISIS coordinator Brett McGurk, who resigned in protest; and savaged Republican Senator Bob Corker, who opposed both the Syria pullout and the "juvenile" shutdown, saying Trump ignored a deal to resolve border security and the status of unauthorized Dreamers brought here when they were children.

When Trump wasn't lambasting "the Fake News media" or officials who've resigned, ignored or criticized him, he was tweeting praise of autocrats in Saudi Arabia and Turkey and looking forward to seeing the North Korean dictator again. He tweeted a picture of himself claiming he was signing bills, but the paper in front of him was blank.

The president took a break from Twitter to go to church, but even there, he couldn't get a break. The sermon was about a cruel emperor, the abuse of power, and the plight of refugees fleeing

violence who — like the Holy Family and Jesus — are denied shelter in “their greatest hour of need.” On Christmas morning, an 8-year-old Guatemalan boy died in the US custody, the same day a 7-year-old Guatemalan girl who died in US custody was buried in her home village. These children posed no threat, but they paid for Trump’s obsession with a wall and border security with their lives.

Recently, Trump said on camera that he’d be “proud to shut down the government for border security . . . I will take the mantle of shutting it down” — though predictably he has since blamed Democrats for refusing to make taxpayers fund a wall that may be both unnecessary and ineffective. When Trump talks about border security, he offers fire and fury, but little evidence.

So let’s review the facts. According to census data analyzed by the libertarian, Koch brothers-funded Cato Institute, immigrants — both illegal and legal — are far less likely to commit crimes and be incarcerated than native-born Americans. A study published this year in the academic journal Criminology found US communities that have experienced an influx of undocumented migrants actually have lower violent crime rates than communities with fewer immigrants. In study after study, statistical evidence shows migrants don’t bring higher crime rates with them, but for Trump it’s about feelings, not facts.

Likewise, illegal border crossings into the United States have been declining for years, despite Trump’s and certain media outlets’ panic over a “crisis” at our southern border. Two-thirds of undocumented immigrants came here legally, but overstayed their visas, according to the Center for Migration Studies. Visa overstayers have outnumbered illegal border-crossers since 2007, and that trend is continuing, making a \$5 billion taxpayer-funded wall a poor application of taxpayer funds and immigration policy.

In Dr. Seuss’ story, the Grinch realizes Christmas isn’t about feasts and presents, but about kindness, causing his shrunken heart to triple in size. I’m not holding my breath for a miracle in the White House, but the new Congress should know border security and immigration aren’t solved by a wall, but by sensible, bipartisan immigration reform, an idea that has long been on the table.