

Reasonable facsimile of a president delivers expected cascade of distortions, but no news

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Jill: It will be shocking if anyone changes their mind about President Donald Trump's border wall, and the shutdown he said he'd be proud to precipitate, as a result of his address to the nation Tuesday night. All expectations were pretty much met, whether you were expecting a cascade of distortions and claims untethered to context and facts, or a reasonable facsimile of an actual president.

The Oval Office set really can make anyone seem presidential. Still, most of us are well past the point of wondering if any given moment was the moment Trump "became president." Nor can we expect a pivot to empathy, despite the buckets of empathy Trump poured on the violence-fleeing families he has detained at the border and denied a chance to apply for asylum; the federal employees and contractors who are not being paid during the government shutdown; and, especially, the families of people killed by illegal immigrants.

"I've held the hands of the weeping mothers and embraced the grieving fathers. So sad. So terrible," Trump said of those relatives. "How much more American blood must be shed before Congress does its job?"

These are terrible tragedies. And yet what immediately came to mind was Democrats introducing a bill earlier in the day to expand gun background checks. Among them were House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, still recovering from her near-death in a shooting rampage eight years ago in Tucson.

Census analysis by the libertarian Cato Institute finds that illegal immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated for crimes than native-born Americans. Illegal immigrants accounted for 32 of 806 homicide convictions in Texas in 2016, the institute found. That compares to 3,353 firearm deaths in Texas that year, including suicides, homicides and accidents. Congress, do your job.

David: Wow, you are trying hard to change the subject. That speech made you think about gun control? Really? You almost have me believing that President Trump delivered an effective speech that might reshuffle the political deck so you'd rather talk about anything else.

The reality was that there was nothing newsworthy in that speech. We've been all over this so many times, you could probably have assembled the president's speech from YouTube clips.

Even the falsehoods were predictable retreads. No, people aren't sneaking drugs into the United States through unguarded sections of the U.S.-Mexico border that could be plugged by a wall; drugs primarily are going through legal points of entry hidden among perfectly legal

shipments or being carried by legal border-crossers. No, the crisis of children coming to the United States illegally isn't because of nefarious forces slipping them in as cover for other wrongdoing; kids are coming here illegally because whole families are fleeing violence in Central America.

I wouldn't be upset if we spent \$5.7 billion on a steel bollard wall as President Trump proposed tonight, but really, networks would have been better off if they had the backbone to deny the president air time for his pointless spiel that didn't really change any minds.

Jill: We are in complete agreement on the networks and I hope the ratings were low enough that they will judge future requests from all presidents on the merits. It's not like presidents have no other way to talk to America these days.

The only thing more depressing than the networks folding, and — trigger alert — I'm about to change the subject again, is stumbling over what Republicans were saying about immigration during the 2016 presidential race. "It's a technological wall, it's a digital wall," former Texas governor Rick Perry, now Trump's Energy secretary, said in July 2016. As for 1,200 miles long and 30 feet high, "I know you can't do that."

And how about some of senators who ran, lost and are still serving, and could theoretically lead some kind of rump resistance to at least reopen the government? Sen. Rand Paul was rightfully concerned back then about visa overstays, the source now of most undocumented immigrants in the U.S. So was Sen. Marco Rubio. He said we needed a fence, but also "you need an e-verify system and you need an entry-exit tracking system and all sorts of other things to prevent illegal immigration."

Only 35 percent of adults in a new Reuters poll said they want a congressional spending bill that includes Trump's wall money. But more than three-quarters of Republicans support the wall, and more than half support the shutdown as a way to get the money. How long will it take for the pain of the shutdown to eclipse the need to placate Trump and fans of that wall? A lot of paychecks and political futures depend on the answer to that question.

David: I think Trump must be willing to absorb a lot of pain from a continued shutdown because he didn't advance his cause in any way I can see tonight.

He didn't offer the Democrats anything big that would be tempt them to give some ground on funding the wall, say a path to legalization for Dreamers. No carrot.

He didn't effectively make the case that he had the power to build the wall unilaterally by declaring a "state of emergency" at the border. No stick.

But I also don't think Trump is the only one who will be feeling pain as the government shutdown continues. The \$5.7 billion Trump is after isn't much money in the context of the whole federal budget. Democrats have to explain why this is a hill worth dying on or, at least, one worth sacrificing the financial well-being of hundreds of thousands of American families on.

Trump is right, there is nothing inherently immoral about building a wall. It is just a more muscular fence, and some of what we have already built on the Mexican border is awfully hard to distinguish from a wall. Why not build a little more and end this budget crisis?