



The facts and public opinion work against Trump on his wall

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Despite my general antipathy for President Trump, I agree with him on one big thing: the United States has an obligation to control its borders and determine who can, and cannot come in. Not that this is a view unique to Trump; every president has thought this and worked to that end as well. Where we go from here is a legitimate and worthy debate, and we are having that debate right now.

That being said, you may have noticed that the president last night called the situation on the Mexican border a “crisis,” which is more accurate than the word his base hoped he would use: “emergency.” You know why it’s not an emergency? Because if it was, Trump and his revolving door of minions wouldn’t have to lie all the time about it. If it was really an emergency, they could just rely on facts. But they can’t, because the facts aren’t on their side.

To give just one example: Trump cherry-picked a few high-profile crimes to paint a picture of national chaos. The crimes he highlighted were true. They were horrible. And they have caused outrage and pain. But when you step back and look at the bigger picture, you’ll find that immigrants—both documented and undocumented—commit far fewer crimes than native born citizens, **according to a Cato Institute study**. If there’s a crime problem, Cato’s data says, look to the natives. This is an inconvenient truth for the White House, one that Trump can’t acknowledge.

Trump’s claim that a wall would stop drugs has also been knocked down by his very own Drug Enforcement Agency, which said in a 2015 report that the vast majority of drugs come in “through (legal) ports of entry” (and thus a wall wouldn’t work). That 2015 report now seems to be missing from the DEA’s website. Perhaps this is also an inconvenient truth for the administration, and the website has been scrubbed?

The president’s other principal claim is that terrorists are pouring over the southern border. As recently as Sunday, press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders made this false claim on Fox News—which was quickly debunked by not only Fox’s Chris Wallace, but Kellyanne Conway, the president’s loyal spinmeister. Sanders said 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.” **The true number is six.**

Here's where the shutdown, which Trump said he would proudly own in the name of national security—is hurting national security. The vast majority of people whose names are in the government database of known or suspected terrorists, try to enter the United States through airports. You've heard about TSA workers calling in sick, the impact of which can only get worse if the shutdown drags on. And get this: the federal safety inspectors who make sure your plane is safe to fly? They have been deemed non-essential employees, and have been furloughed.

Feel safer now?

The pilots flying those planes don't. They just sent Trump and congressional leaders **a scorching letter** urging an end to the shutdown, warning that it is “adversely affecting the safety, security and efficiency of our national airspace system.”

So much for safety and security.

So other than being wrong about crime, drugs and stopping terrorists, the president is right on. Like I said, if the facts were on his side he wouldn't have to make things up.

Then there is this contradiction: Trump bragged about the economy last night. And it's good: 312,000 jobs were added in December, and the jobless rate is 3.9%. Everyone who wants a job has one, and wages are rising. Manufacturing has made a strong rebound. And **yet the Labor Department said just yesterday that there are still 6.9 million job openings** nationwide.

Companies all across the economy report labor shortages, and it's holding back growth. So why is Trump spreading fear about immigrants stealing our jobs? If your dream is to clean motel rooms, pick strawberries on a farm, or work on a construction site, perhaps this argument has merit—but I suspect this isn't you, now is it?

Border security is a legitimate issue. But on every important angle, including security, jobs and the economy, the president is on the wrong side of the facts. But he made a promise to his base, and here we are. Trump has been told by congressional Republicans that backing down now could hurt his re-election prospects next year. But conversely, the more he digs in, the longer the shutdown continues, the more people—voters nationwide—will be hurt. I'll leave you with this: Only one-fifth of federal workers are employed in the Washington area; the other 79% are spread across the country. There are big pools of them in every swing state—Florida, Ohio, etc.—and many have now had their paychecks taken away. The president has boxed himself in on this one.