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The hazards of Donald Trump's distorted perception of reality

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Donald Trump's base rationalizes his lies as stories meant to illuminate a "larger truth" but not be taken literally. However, stories presented as fact without a shred of evidence serve only to distort people's perception of reality, which compromises decision-making and, on this large a scale, threatens our economy and our security.

Democrats understand that border barriers are critical for national security, but not a 1000-mile 30-foot high wall, which won't slow drug trafficking, deter criminals or gangs, or even reduce illegal entry. Moreover, there are logistical drawbacks about which Trump seems completely unaware. Even his supporters have trouble defending it. When Nancy Pelosi described the wall as wasteful and ineffective, Larry Elder's rebuttal (Spectrum 1/3/19) inexplicably consisted solely of a list of wasteful projects supported by Democrats, unwittingly putting the wall in that same category.

Drug enforcement officials confirm that drugs come across the southern border in cars or trucks at normal transit points or by air or sea, although some smugglers resort to catapults, which a wall won't stop. Drugs also come from China through the mail or across the northern border (Politifact).

A Cato Institute analysis of variables likely to thwart Trump's plans, plus a few newer items, are summarized below (<https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/why-wall-wont-work>).

The administration has continuously misused government statistics regarding criminals and terrorists at the southern border. Kelly Ann Conway even admitted as much. They counted some people multiple times, didn't distinguish between legal and illegal crossings, conflated arrests with convictions, included minor offenses and misdemeanors. Also, potential terrorists don't walk across the border; they fly in on commercial airlines.

Trump exploited two tragic murders to inflate the myth of imminent threat. In reality, U.S. natives commit most violent crimes and undocumented people the least. MS-13 is much more active in Central America than in the U.S. and many asylum-seekers are fleeing from it. It has a presence here, but no American towns have been "occupied," and many members are US citizens.

Even Ann Coulter acknowledges "that not 1 inch of Trump's wall has been built.." Repair and replacement, yes; new construction, no. Even this hasn't affected the total numbers of crossings, just relocated them.

Previously, undocumented immigrants were mostly young men seeking seasonal farm work. Changing demographics, not numbers, which have decreased dramatically over the last three decades, are causing a humanitarian, not a national security, crisis at the southern border. Today's immigrants are families, and border stations are equipped for adults, not children. Most enter through legal checkpoints; those who don't immediately surrender to Border Patrol. Entering "illegally" to request asylum is not a crime. The vast majority of undocumented aliens enter legally and overstay their visas. A wall won't help.

Donald Trump claims, "We're the only country in the world" with birthright citizenship. "It was always told to me that you needed a constitutional amendment [to eliminate it]. ...I can do it just with an executive order." "There's a town in California where they actually tried to take over the town council. All illegal aliens running the town council." They are sucking up our resources and contributing nothing.

Thirty other countries have birthright citizenship. Few legal scholars believe an executive order can overturn the 14th Amendment. Children of immigrants can't sponsor relatives until they're 21. The California town doesn't exist. Solid data indicate that immigrants, including undocumented, don't drain U.S. resources but over their lifetimes constitute a net gain.

None of the following has been factored into Trump's cost estimates:

- A wall won't stop tunneling, ladders, or ramps. Underground barriers or even sufficient electronic surveillance would be prohibitively expensive.
- Solid barriers have environmental consequences. Walls and debris-blocked fences impede water flow causing flooding and erosion. Barriers block migration, destroy ecosystems, and require constant repair and maintenance against storms and earthquakes.
- Much of the border is on private land. Trump would have to invoke eminent domain and pay landowners. That, plus ensuing legal battles will be enormously expensive, regardless of whether he declares a national emergency.

Sadly, it will probably be these last items — monetary rather than human costs — that ultimately tank the entire endeavor.