

POLITIFACT

Fact-checking Donald Trump's rally in Wheeling, W.Va.

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For the second time in two months, President Donald Trump traveled to friendly territory in West Virginia to hold one of his signature campaign rallies.

At the rally, in Wheeling, W.Va., Trump boosted the candidacy of Patrick Morrissey, who is challenging U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, a Democrat.

Trump repeated many of his favorite applause lines from previous rallies, including praise for the state of the economy and shots at Democrats over immigration policy, gun control and his tax law.

Here are some of the lines from his speech, fact-checked.

"We're opening up steel mills."

This is more accurate than previous statements by Trump in which he's repeatedly exaggerated the scale of U.S. Steel's expansion. The company is restarting two shuttered mills, but it is not building multiple new plant complexes, as he's said in the past. As we've noted, between restarts, new mills and expansions, the steel industry has seen significant investment this year.

Democrats believe in "open borders."

During the 2016 presidential election, Trump charged Democrat Hillary Clinton with favoring open borders. As we have reported, experts say that making it easier for undocumented immigrants to obtain legal status is not the same as getting rid of enforcement and allowing open borders.

There actually is a long history to "open borders." The United States essentially had them for 85 years, the libertarian Cato Institute has said. "From 1790 to 1875," the institute says, any "immigrant from any country could legally enter, live and work in the United States."

There "are no members of Congress who support 'open borders' or anything that even approaches it," Cato analyst Alex Nowrasteh has told us.

Edward Alden, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations who authored a 2008 book on federal actions to tighten U.S. borders after 9/11, added that he sees it as "a derogatory term that doesn't have a whole lot of analytical meaning. It's not even in the conversation in Washington," where the focus since the 1990s has been on strengthening border security.

In West Virginia, "they did a poll, just came out -- overall total support for (Supreme Court nominee Brett) Kavanaugh, 58 percent, total opposed, 28 percent."

Trump is accurate about the poll findings, but it's worth mentioning that the survey is not exactly a neutral one. It was conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, a Republican firm, on behalf of the Judicial Crisis Network, a key group that's promoting Kavanaugh's confirmation. (The name of the website where it's posted is "confirmkavanaugh.com.") It polled 722 voters in West Virginia after the testimonies of Kavanaugh and his accuser, Christine Blasey Ford, on Sept. 27, and it has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.65 percentage points.

"We've built a lot of wall already. We've fixed a lot of wall."

This is an exaggeration.

There are projects underway to replace fencing along the border in San Diego and further east in Calexico. Those call for new and taller, bollard-style barriers, which include a comb-like array of steel posts that border patrol agents can see through, some of which were planned long before Trump ran for office.

A recent appropriation by Congress of \$1.6 billion allows for the replacement of the old fencing, but not for the construction of any sort of concrete wall prototype as Trump requested.

"First and foremost, this isn't Trump's wall," Jonathan Pacheco, a spokesman for the Border Patrol's El Centro Sector, which includes Calexico, told the Los Angeles Times in March 2018. "This isn't the infrastructure that Trump is trying to bring in. ... This new wall replacement has absolutely nothing to do with the prototypes that were shown over in the San Diego area."

Plans for the Calexico project, which also include a bollard-style structure, began in 2009 under the Obama administration and were funded in 2017, under Trump, according to the Times.

"When you see 'Democratic Party,' it's wrong. There's no name, 'Democratic Party.'"

This is false. While critics, mostly Republicans, have long made a point of referring to the party as the "Democrat Party," the official party organization is the "Democratic National Committee" and party members almost always use "Democratic" unless they happen to slip up on the wording.

"The Democrat Party is radical socialism."

Socialism refers to the government owning, or at least controlling, the means of production. This is not in the Democratic platform or something any Democrat takes to the campaign trail.

Referring to recent Republican charges that U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., is a "socialist," Philip J. Williams, professor at the Center for Latin American studies at the University of Florida, told PolitiFact that the notion is "ludicrous. His stances in opposition to the tax cut bill and in support of Medicaid expansion are mainstream Democratic positions. Even some Republican governors have supported Medicaid expansion."

While some might describe Medicare or Medicaid as socialism because the government is providing health insurance to citizens, the health industry remains in private hands, said Sean D. Ehrlich, a Florida State University political science professor.

"The government doesn't control the production of health care," Ehrlich said. "They merely regulate some elements and reimburse providers and consumers for their health care costs."

"I will always fight for and always protect patients with pre-existing conditions ... Some people think that's not a Republican thing to do, I don't care. All the Republicans are coming into that position, too. Pre-existing conditions are safe."

Trump's own Justice Department has decided not to defend against a lawsuit filed by Republican state attorneys general that seeks to topple the Affordable Care Act. This puts the Trump administration on the side of those whose lawsuit would effectively end protections within the law for people with pre-existing conditions.

As we've noted, the lawsuit argues that in 2012, the Supreme Court upheld the law's individual mandate to purchase health insurance by saying it was enforced by a tax penalty, but in 2017, Congress repealed the mechanism to enforce the individual mandate through the tax code.

With the tax penalty now gone, the suit argues, the individual mandate is no longer constitutional and, as a result, the law should be either largely or entirely thrown out.

Health policy experts say the lawsuit would effectively end the pre-existing condition protections under the ACA.

"There would be much more damage beyond the issue of people with health problems being denied coverage, but that would in fact be one outcome," said Linda Blumberg, a health policy analyst at the Urban Institute.