

## Trump doubles down on dubious figures on cost of illegal immigration

Gina Heeb

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- In a tweet Sunday, President Donald Trump said without evidence that illegal immigration has cost the US more than \$18 billion so far in 2019.
- That contradicts widespread estimates, even from conservative and anti-immigration groups.
- It also is at odds with his own previous assertions.

President Donald Trump said Sunday that illegal immigration has cost the US more than \$18 billion so far in 2019, contrary to expert findings.

"We are not even into February and the cost of illegal immigration so far this year is \$18,959,495,168," he wrote on Twitter. "Cost Friday was \$603,331,392. There are at least 25,772,342 illegal aliens, not the 11,000,000 that have been reported for years, in our Country."

President Trump has previously asserted similar claims without evidence, saying that immigrants unlawfully in the United States cost the country hundreds of billions of dollars per year.

"Illegal immigration costs the United States more than 200 Billion Dollars a year," he wrote on Twitter in December 2018. "How was this allowed to happen?"

Estimates on the net costs of illegal immigration vary, but most are a fraction of that number. A 2013 report from the conservative Heritage Foundation, for example, estimated that illegal immigrant households impose a fiscal burden of about \$54.5 billion per year.

Neither the White House nor the Department of Homeland Security responded to emails requesting comment.

"I have no idea where that number comes from," said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian research organization. "It seems to be conjured out of thin air. I haven't seen any fiscal cost estimates, either reputable or disreputable, that place the number at \$200 billion per year."

Trump's claim even left anti-immigration groups flummoxed. It exceeded estimates from the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a Southern Poverty Law Center-designated hate group that seeks to reduce both legal and illegal immigration.

"We're not sure how the president is sourcing his number and really wouldn't want to speculate," said David Ray, communications director for FAIR.

The president has also repeatedly contradicted his own estimates, recently claiming the net cost of illegal immigration was \$250 billion. And during the 2016 campaign, he asserted that cost was \$113 billion a year.

"This is an issue that he goes back to again and again," said Daniel Hopkins, a political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania. "He tries to mobilize his base and to signal to core longtime Republican constituencies that he's fighting on one of their signature issues."

His most recent claim comes as a standoff over border-security funding threatens another partial government shutdown.