



## **Trump was right to give Venezuela's embattled Guaidó a show of public support**

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February 5, 2020

President Trump is the most anti-Hispanic U.S. leader in recent history, but he deserves applause for the hero's welcome he gave to Juan Guaidó, the courageous president of Venezuela's National Assembly.

Trump got this one right.

He gave Guaidó a much-needed political boost not just by inviting him to his State of the Union address, but also by referring to the Venezuelan opposition leader during the speech as "the legitimate president of Venezuela." The next day, Trump welcomed Guaidó to the White House, with honors.

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and fellow Democratic legislators deserve credit, too. They gave Guaidó a standing ovation when Trump mentioned him during his address. For a brief moment, Republicans and Democrats left their bitter differences aside and, together, paid homage to the 36-year-old Venezuelan leader.

"Here this evening is a very brave man who carries with him the hopes, the dreams and aspirations of all Venezuelans," Trump said in his speech.

After saying that the United States "supports the hopes" of Cubans, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans to restore democracy, Trump looked at the gallery where Guaidó was standing and added, "Mr. President, please take this message back to your homeland."

It was a major show of support, and it couldn't have come at a more critical time. Guaidó needs all the support he can get amid growing political — and physical — attacks against him by the Venezuelan dictatorship.

Early last year, the United States and more than 50 other countries recognized Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate leader after dictator Nicolás Maduro's fraudulent 2018 elections.

But Maduro is still in power and has vowed to take over the opposition-controlled National Assembly — Venezuela’s last remaining democratically elected institution — in legislative elections scheduled for December. He already has threatened several times to imprison, ban or arbitrarily replace Guaidó.

Granted, Trump’s speech was an election stunt, and his references to Guaidó were aimed partly at winning key South Florida Cuban- and Venezuelan-American votes in November.

During the weekend, it seemed that Trump had snubbed Guaidó, who had asked for a meeting with the U.S. president while the two were in South Florida. The request was not granted. Trump was seen golfing in West Palm Beach that weekend.

And Guaidó’s name was not on Trump’s original list of special guests for the State of the Union address released by the White House on Tuesday. It was added to the list shortly before Trump spoke.

On Wednesday, Guaidó reciprocated Trump’s warm reception in Congress by tweeting “We’re united, President Trump,” with no reference to the Democrats. Was that omission a Trump-negotiated condition for inviting Guaidó? After the release of transcripts showing how Trump tried to get the government of Ukraine to taint the Democrats before the November elections, it can’t be ruled out.

The rest of Trump’s speech included his usual tirades against undocumented Latin American immigrants, demonizing immigrants with fake facts.

He talked extensively about “criminal illegal immigrants,” blaming them for 10,000 burglaries last year, and showcased the case of “a criminal alien” who was charged with the rape and murder of a 92-year-old woman.

As usual, he made it sound as if most undocumented immigrants are criminals. In fact, a 2018 Cato Institute study shows that undocumented immigrants commit fewer crimes than native-born Americans.

“You have no shame, Mr. President,” U.S. Rep. Donna Shalala, D-Miami, tweeted after Trump’s speech. “Immigrants built this great country, but you choose to ignore that fact. Instead, you peddle fear and division by equating immigrants to murderers and rapists.”

Trump has cut off aid to Central America, continues to build a politically motivated, and useless, wall along the Mexican border, has separated babies from their immigrant mothers and has failed to give temporary protections status to Venezuelans fleeing their country’s dictatorship.

By these and many other measures, including his reference to Central America’s “shithole countries,” Trump is no friend of Latinos.

Still, Trump did the right thing in backing Guaidó. So did the Democrats, who applauded him. Hopefully, this bipartisan show of support will move Washington to pay more attention to Venezuela’s humanitarian crisis.