

THE WEEK

4 dangerous falsehoods Donald Trump is peddling on trade and immigration

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The lower Donald Trump's rhetoric sinks, the higher his poll numbers soar. Or so he seems to believe. And so, he is lobbing mud balls at everyone and everything, without regard to what or whom he sullies.

The filthiest yet might be on immigration and trade. If the GOP doesn't want itself stained for generations to come, it needs to wash off Trump's dirt with actual facts pronto.

1. Restoring Operation Wetback

The central plank of Trump's campaign is his pledge to mass-evict 11 million undocumented immigrants. How will he accomplish this feat? Basically, he said at the last debate, by reviving Dwight Eisenhower's notorious 1950s Operation Wetback, under which 1.5 million illegal immigrants were deported.

This program represents one of the most notorious abuses of police power in 20th century America. It involved a massive and virtually unprecedented mobilization of the police state with some 800 federal agents — equipped with arms, trucks, and planes — hunting down illegal immigrants and herding them, like cattle, in ships and trains in 125 degree heat. About 100 people died from heat stroke in one such human dump alone.

There is a lot of evidence suggesting that what eventually diminished the illegal population in America wasn't this inhumane crackdown, but the deregulation of bracero, or the guest worker program that allowed American farmers to rehire the deported Mexicans after a brief touch-back to Mexico — a totally redundant formality.

Trump has said nothing about creating such a program. This means not only that he'll have to scale up Operation Wetback 10 times because the illegal population is 10 times bigger now, but also get much, much more draconian — his assurances that he'll be very "humane" because he's a "very nice person" notwithstanding.

Under Operation Wetback, the deportees were men with no deep roots in the community. Undocumented workers today have lived, on average, a decade in the U.S., and have families. Evicting them would unleash misery and terror on American soil at a scale unseen since the Civil War. About 9 million people live in mixed-status families. Indeed, about 7 percent of K-12 students have one illegal parent. All of them would face the constant fear that every knock on the

door is a SWAT team arriving to offer them this Sophie's Choice: They either hand over their undocumented members or they all leave together.

2. Ending birthright citizenship to avoid anchor babies

Countless times, Trump has declared that America needs to scrap its birthright citizenship to avoid being a magnet for Latino anchor babies. "A woman gets pregnant. She's nine months, she walks across the border, she has the baby in the United States, and we take care of the baby for 85 years?" he says. "I don't think so."

But to quote the immortal words of author Mary McCarthy, "Every word [in that statement] is a lie, including 'and' and 'the.'"

For starters, scrapping birthright citizenship would require a constitutional amendment, not simply a new law as Trump repeatedly insists. And the notion that Mexican women in advanced stages of pregnancy furtively waddle across the border in droves to have just-in-time deliveries isn't backed up by evidence. The Pew Research Center found that as of 2013, the median duration of residence for illegal immigrants living in the U.S. was 13 years; a full 88 percent had been living in the country for five years or more. More to the point, they overwhelmingly trend male — suggesting that undocumented women have babies because they have built lives in America, not because they come here to have babies.

What's more, we don't "take care of the baby for 85 years" — and not just because the baby doesn't remain a baby for 85 years and average Latino longevity in America is only 80 years. Poor Latinos, especially undocumented ones, don't stay at home drinking tequila and collecting welfare checks. They work incredibly hard.

The unemployment rate among Latinos is three points lower than among blacks, and is even lower among undocumented Latinos. And low-skilled foreigners, including adults and their U.S.-born children, were generally less likely than Americans to receive means-tested public benefits from Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Supplemental Security Income, according to a Cato Institute study. In short, America might be milking Latinos, not the other way around.

3. Forcing Mexico to pay for the Great Wall of Trump

Trump's plan for "Making America Great Again" involves building the Great Wall of Trump on the U.S.-Mexico border. This would require the government to perpetrate a massive land grab on a scale never seen, since much of the border land is privately owned. That shouldn't be a problem for President Trump because he thinks that eminent domain (the government's power to confiscate private property) "happens to be good." In fact, much of his empire is built on its abuse. But what will be a problem is Trump's insistence that he'll force Mexico to pick up the tab for the wall.

How would he do this? Apparently by applying the country's \$50 billion-plus trade imbalance with the United States toward the wall. This makes no sense unless Trump hilariously

thinks that the imbalance means that Mexico has overcharged us for the goods we bought from it. But that is emphatically not what a trade imbalance is. It just means that we have bought more goods from Mexico than we sold to them. (There is nothing sinister about it. We all have a 100 percent trade imbalance with the local grocery store because we only *buy* goods from it.) There is no unclaimed \$50 billion surplus lying around in Mexico. The U.S. already received corresponding goods. "To demand that Mexico bear the cost of building the wall is to demand something for nothing," notes George Mason University's Larry White. This would be extortion. Call it mafia trade policy.

If Mexico doesn't pay, Trump says he'll withhold the remittances of Mexican workers. But these remittances represent wages earned for services rendered. Confiscating them would also be theft. In other words, Trump's plan to Make America Great Again involves stealing the property of Americans and the wages of Mexicans — turning America into a Third World-style kleptocracy.

4. Ending Chinese currency manipulation

Trump berated the Obama administration's Trans-Pacific Partnership as a "horrible deal" during the last debate. Why? Because it lets China, "the number one abuser of this country...take advantage through currency manipulation."

Never mind that China isn't even part of the TPP, as Sen. Rand Paul pointed out. Still, is Trump's rap that the Middle Kingdom deliberately keeps the value of its yuan low to make its exports to America more competitive credible?

Yes... but here's the thing: Many countries "manipulate" their currencies, including — no, especially — the United States through its loose monetary policy and artificially low interest rates. The world would be a much better place if no one did this. But slapping China with retaliatory tariffs, as Trump is threatening, would almost certainly be illegal under World Trade Organization's rules. It would also trigger a global trade war whose biggest casualty would be low-income Americans who would see the prices of basic goods shoot up.

Unlike the previous three Trumpisms that have echoes in right-wing restrictionism, this one has largely (though not exclusively) been the staple of left-wing protectionists such Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer. This might be Trump's idea of a bipartisan consensus, but what's shocking about it is not just its outrageousness but its crudeness. It betrays just how little he really understands about complicated issues of public policy. It's all a load of Trump.

So here's a suggestion for Trump, given that he hates a bad deal: He should return the degree he got from University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business and ask for his money back. It was clearly a total waste.

No doubt, Wharton will be only too happy to oblige — and then maybe the GOP could find a way pay him to go away too.