


# Here Are The Biggest Whoppers From Trump's 2020 State Of The Union

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President Donald Trump spoke for about an hour and 20 minutes before the U.S. Congress on Tuesday and largely stuck to the script, successfully avoiding any tirades about the ongoing Senate impeachment trial.

But even on message, the president's State of the Union speech was all over the place.

He boasted about achievements in promoting peace between Israelis and Palestinians even though his plan makes fighting between them even more likely. He claimed he is protecting preexisting conditions in health care, even though he has repeatedly tried to kill the Affordable Care Act. He bragged about the healthy economy as a strong indicator of the success of his presidency, when much of the economy's success is due to factors outside of Trump's control.

Like most Trump speeches, the address was chock-full of statements that misrepresented his record and policy positions. Here are some of the highlights.

## 'We Will Always Protect Patients With Preexisting Conditions'

"I have also made an ironclad pledge to American families: We will always protect patients with preexisting conditions — that is a guarantee," Trump said.

He's been making versions of that claim since he first became president. But it was a lie then and it is a lie now. He spent most of 2017 working with the Republican Congress to repeal the Affordable Care Act, including with legislation that would have undermined or eliminated entirely the key parts of the law — including a requirement that insurers charge everybody the same premiums, regardless of medical status, and that all policies include comprehensive benefits.

The repeal effort failed, but Trump has kept at it by using his executive authority. In 2018, his administration allowed the sale of "limited duration" plans that would allow insurers to charge higher premiums, or deny coverage altogether, to people with preexisting conditions.

And things could get worse. The administration is backing a lawsuit that, if successful, would wipe out the Affordable Care Act. Most legal experts think the case is a joke, but it's now won support in two federal courts. A hearing before the Supreme Court could be next.

Beyond general comments on health care, Trump returned to a specific lie from last year: the claim that he's tackling the prevalence of AIDS. "We will eradicate the AIDS epidemic in America by the end of the decade," he said. In fact, the president's efforts to stop reproductive health providers from talking about abortion by cutting off government funding are making it harder to prevent the transmission of AIDS both within the U.S. and abroad.

## 'Prey Upon The Public'

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Trump's comments on immigration were typically misleading and incendiary.

He provided an especially flagrant misrepresentation on so-called sanctuary cities that restrict cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"In sanctuary cities, local officials order police to release dangerous criminal aliens to prey upon the public, instead of handing them over to ICE to be safely removed," Trump said.

That's not actually how it works. There's no set definition for a sanctuary city — some referenced under the term, like California, aren't actually cities at all — but it broadly means one with policies that allow people to be released from police custody whenever they otherwise would be, even if ICE has requested they be held longer. Dangerous people remain locked up if they're convicted or denied bail or bond. Some federal judges have ruled it unconstitutional to keep people longer than they would be on only an ICE request.

While there are examples of people being released and going on to commit other crimes — as Trump noted — multiple researchers have found there is no link between "sanctuary" policies and crime.

## 'Blue-Collar Boom'

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Trump gave himself and Republicans sole credit for the economy, again calling it a "blue-collar boom." "If we hadn't reversed the failed economic policies of the previous administration, the world would not now be witnessing this great economic success," Trump said in the speech.

While it's true the economy has grown stronger since the Great Recession, improvements predate Trump. Much of the blue-collar wage growth he boasted about in his State of the Union speech most likely results from state minimum wage increases rather than Trump's policies. And in the first annual comprehensive review of Trump's Tax Cuts and Jobs Act,

the Congressional Research Service reported that the legislation did not live up to its promises. According to the CRS, the gross domestic product grew at 2.9%, which shows no significant boost to the economy given its positive trend before the bill passed.

U.S. manufacturing, one of Trump's favorite industries to mention, has suffered because of his trade wars.

The president also gave himself credit for an initial deal with China that he says will ultimately lead to a better economic relationship between the U.S. and the world's second-biggest economy — even though it's unclear whether the key element of the bargain that's supposed to benefit American workers will actually be implemented and its effects have yet to be seen.

And he boasted that people had been "lifted off" welfare — which is due to improvements in the economy and stricter eligibility rules initiated by President Barack Obama. Trump's welfare proposals have yet to take effect.

## **'Bold Regulatory Reduction Campaign'**

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Trump bragged Tuesday of having "shattered the mentality of American decline" and took credit for the United States becoming "the number one producer of oil and natural gas in the world, by far." In fact, it was in 2012, under Obama, that the U.S. became the top producer, as CNN's Daniel Dale noted in a tweet ahead of Trump's speech.

The actual effect of what Trump called his "bold regulatory reduction campaign" has been protecting planet-heating emissions from cars and power plants and ending the U.S. commitment to the climate goals of the landmark international Paris agreement that almost every other nation is still committed to. The president has shortened the review process under the National Environmental Policy Act, clearing the way for new infrastructure projects, particularly those dealing with fossil fuels, to ignore climate change as an issue altogether. And he's stripped federal protections from nearly half the nation's wetlands and hundreds of thousands of streams, proposed making it legal to incidentally kill migratory birds, and cleared the way to approve old, bee-killing pesticides and new, potentially human-killing "forever chemicals."

## **The 'Peace Plan'**

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Trump previewed his 2020 sales pitch about his foreign policy: that he's making Americans safer by taking aggressive steps that his predecessors avoided — treating foreigners, whom he presents as exploitative or threatening or both, with greater wariness and in some cases outright violence.

First, he misrepresented the way U.S. allies are addressing Washington's frustrations with

their failure to meet expectations on defense spending for members of the NATO alliance, a top issue for him but also a priority for predecessors like Obama. Other countries have raised more than \$400 billion already, he claimed — a lie Dale called out by noting that, per NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, those countries will be paying that amount by 2024.

Then the president gave himself a pat on the back for killing Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the so-called Islamic State, ignoring the role Obama's administration played in crafting the anti-ISIS strategy he followed, and for last month ordering the assassination of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, a dramatic escalation in the confrontation between Washington and Tehran and a move that past presidents considered but decided would be too risky. The move prompted retaliatory strikes by Iran that injured 50 American troops and worsened U.S. relations with Iraq, where the U.S. targeted Soleimani.

And he promoted another move that inflamed regional tensions: his "peace plan" for Israelis and Palestinians — a framework that infuriated the Palestinians and their supporters and emboldened Israeli hard-liners eager to advance policies like settlements and annexation that violate international law and human rights standards.

Trump's continued failure to explore serious diplomacy made it harder for him to make good on a 2016-era promise that he's continued to talk about: bringing back American forces and winding down the country's foreign wars.

"We are working to end America's wars in the Middle East," Trump claimed Tuesday night. Since May, the president has sent more than 20,000 additional American troops to the Middle East, including deploying some to Saudi Arabia for the first time since 2003. He's simultaneously complicated the alliances that Washington could lean on for support instead of investing its own resources, most notably with his high-profile abandonment of a crucial U.S. partner in the counter-ISIS fight, the Syrian Kurds, last year.

*Jonathan Cohn, Chris D'Angelo and Alexander C. Kaufman contributed reporting.*