

Trump, the State of the Un-Union Address and Other Nonsense



By José R. Cabañas Rodríguez / taken from RESUMEN LATINOAMERICO and THE THRID WORLD /
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The so-called State of the Union Address is currently a verbal presentation by the President of the United States to a joint session of Congress (House and Senate) in a plenary hall of the Capitol, which is also attended by members of the Supreme Court, senior government officials, the accredited diplomatic corps and a select list of guests.

The tradition was started by the first president of the Union, George Washington, although it was not until the beginning of the 20th century (1913) that Woodrow Wilson resumed it. From that moment on, senior executives alternated live presentations with written reports. In 1934, the event began to be convened more regularly at the beginning of each year.

In theory, it is an opportunity for the US president to present what can be considered his government plan for the coming months and, in particular, those budgetary initiatives that will need legislative backing and that would be preceded by endless negotiations.

In reality, with the passage of time, the emergence of television and the trivialization of politics, the event began to take on theatrical features. The staging became more sophisticated to the point of rehearsing the pauses in which the applause was previously coordinated, the moments to highlight the presence of a guest and, in the same way, the occasions when some congressmen or senators booed certain phrases of the speech.

Part of the ceremony includes, once the president's presentation is over and outside the venue, the so-called response of the supposed opposition, or party that is not in the government (only two alternate) and some intervention by a member of the president's own party, to "highlight" the successes of the former.

That said, the analyst's analysis of the words of the chief executive yields one result when read and a completely different one when seen in the context of the collective performance that surrounds them, the camera shots, the collective gesticulation and much more. Added to this is everything that the press and "other informed sources" have said before and after the exercise. Nowadays, speculation or statements made on digital networks before, during and after are incorporated into the great crossword puzzle.

In this latest exercise on March 4th, the first problem is presented with the nomenclature of the activity (State of the Union Address), firstly because it is a country at the peak of political polarization, which at the moment has no tool that allows it to see itself as ONE NATION. It was therefore the state of DisUnion. The second thing is that practically everything Trump says is aimed at further disunity, at resorting to more extreme positions, which are unlikely to make the country healthier or more hegemonic.

It is common in the United States for analysts to turn down the volume of the television or other electronic devices in order to better grasp what the image they are observing has to offer; often the content of what is being said does not matter. If we do this for the case in question, then we are left with the impression of a one-man show, in which the rest of the members of his "party" (or what remains of it) had as their priority to be seen applauding and unequivocally supporting the leader. To this we should add the Democratic failure to give a coherent response, both in terms of histrionics and content.

When Trump's text (without seeing images) is related to what he has done in the preceding days, the desire to present as unique results a profusion of executive decisions that have yet to demonstrate their practical and, above all, constructive outcome for the country, is obvious. Statements such as "We have achieved more in 43 days than most administrations achieve in four or eight years", or "in the last six weeks, I have signed nearly 100 decrees and taken more than 400 executive actions, a record" were made very early on in the speech.

Trump's other initial purpose was to change the story (a frequent inclination in his field) about the real results of last November's elections, in which with a little more effort he would have won the unanimous support of all Americans. This action generated such a backlash among Democrats that it prompted an indication from the Speaker of the House (who theoretically presides over the proceedings) threatening to

use force to remove those who raised their voices from the premises.

It must be recognized that Trump is not someone who waits for others to praise his performance, it is an attitude that he has assumed for himself from the outset, both when comparing himself to his predecessor and when recalling his first term in office and making use of the proposals with which he will “save” the country and return it to a “golden age”. The small detail is that several of the actions he boasted about during the speech are contradictory, unsubstantiated and change almost daily. Perhaps the example of the use of tariffs against third parties would suffice.

When reviewing similar oratory pieces by other presidents, even ignoring the levels of sincerity they may have had in each case, phrases about the willingness to reach out and work together with the other party (across the aisle) are repeatedly heard, in reference to the obvious fact that in order to pursue policies that represent the interests of the country, consensus must be achieved. Well, on this occasion the language has been simply take it or leave it, join me if you want to survive, or I don't need anyone else.

Very early on in his speech, Trump showed his commitment to the so-called old economy and his willingness to withdraw all the regulations that have been established with regard to the extractive industry or fossil fuels, in the interests of preserving the environment. All the science, research and intellect that has shown the damage of such practices even to the water that Americans drink was ignored with the brand new phrase “drill, baby, drill”.

Some of his predecessors used the sixty minutes of their speech (Trump spoke for half an hour longer) to focus on the country's problems, others to try to justify military spending, or wars of aggression (Ronald Reagan). The 45th-47th presidents, however, did strike a balance between the internal and the external, but drawing parallels between local “opposition” to their agenda and the norms of multilateralism, which they consider almost all to be anti-American, unnecessary, and to be renounced immediately.

Certainly, we must recognize Trump's contribution to the theory of what has been considered until now as the role of alliances, who Washington's strategic partners are and how, to be the leader of something, you must have the support of someone (if you allow me, as an academic).

The analysis of these interventions must also take into account the context in which they occur. It is worth remembering that this speech took place just a few hours after the schism caused by Trump's meeting with the President of Ukraine in the Oval Office and preceded a meeting of the Council of the European Union, at which the participating leaders basically went to ask themselves “what the heck is this?” in relation to that event and to Trump's interpretation of NATO.

But returning to the Congress chamber, Trump thanked the foreigner residing in the US with the greatest financial wealth and with direct and indirect links to South African apartheid for having taken the trouble to come to the “land of freedom” to review his finances and try to achieve greater efficiency in the government.

Trump listed what would be part of Elon Musk's most important findings these days, including:

“\$22 billion from H.H.S. to provide free housing and cars to illegal aliens. \$45 million for scholarships on diversity, equity and inclusion in Burma. \$40 million to improve the social and economic inclusion of sedentary migrants.”

“\$60 million for the empowerment of indigenous and Afro-Caribbean peoples in Central America. \$60 million. \$8 million to turn rats transgender—this is real. \$32 million for a left-wing propaganda operation in Moldova. \$10 million for male circumcision in Mozambique.”

Reading these figures and the contemptuous way in which the president refers to third parties, one may wonder if they will be able to be consistent with their own philosophy and take this introspective analysis

to its conclusion. In the case of Cuba, would they be able to identify the billions of dollars approved for “regime change” that have ended up in Floridian pockets, which in the end are recycled and contribute to paying for the political careers of individuals frustrated in business or academic life, who constantly return to the federal budget to make up for their personal deficiencies in terms of creativity or productivity. The total of 66 years of confrontation against Cuba has been one of the biggest thefts from US taxpayers, including those who have no access to healthcare or education.

There is no doubt that any professional auditor would find many flaws in the US budget system under both Democrats and Republicans. There has simply been an alternation of at least two different forms of corruption. In fact, one of the main recipients of federal funds, the Pentagon, has not been able to satisfy the demands of the audits that have been carried out on it in the last 10 years.

What we are trying to say here is that what the current group in power in Washington is announcing is the substitution of one scheme of embezzlement for another, in which basically the citizens they consider “second class” (minorities, immigrants, disabled people, low-income communities), so that big capital can continue its triumphant march to contaminate/destroy the country and the world as a consequence.

Suddenly, as if lost in his words, a fleeting mention of a new attempt to “reduce taxes”. These interventions are rarely analyzed with sufficient data. The press and private commentators are in a hurry to be able to offer a headline in a few hours. But at least we should remember the legislation proposed by Trump and passed at full speed in 2017, which already considerably reduced the obligations of the richest, granting benefits to those with lower incomes in the short term, which were reversed in the long term.

It is true that the United States faces a risk to its economic competitiveness, more evident in the case of China, but also with other third parties. But one of the problems with the Trumpist view of the matter is to consider that this reality can be changed only by investing MORE money in one industry or another. Little was said on March 4 about the advancement of science, technology or innovation, rather there were words of contempt for these fields.

In his penchant for rewriting history, Trump considered that all the earthly and divine evils that plague the United States have come from abroad: there are no US cartels, no national traffickers, all rapists have Hispanic or African-American surnames. It is very difficult to ask him to remember that the land he is trading on was the property of native peoples, the last descendants of whom today live on so-called “Indian reservations”, with the worst rates of diabetes and malnutrition.

Let’s be objective, because not all references can be critical. Trump was right to describe the American health tragedy and, consequently, the aim of making the country “healthy again” would be valid. It is true that there is no reason to explain the high rates of juvenile cancer in that country, or other indicators. It is a reality that can be changed, with its own resources, and even with the support of third parties. The new Secretary of Health, the national academies of sciences and the American Society for the Advancement of Science could well inform him of who the main partners in the field of health in the region would be, those who during his first term of office assisted specific communities in the US, those with whom more than 30 city councils in the union have voted a resolution to establish cooperation.

In his fifth State of the Union address, Trump used every argument at hand to show that he was elected by both the human and the divine. I can’t help but say: “I believe my life was saved that day in Butler, Missouri for a very good reason. I was saved by God to restore greatness to America, I am convinced of it.” For many, the phrase reopened old doubts about a story that was poorly told at the time, in which an inexperienced shooter and very irresponsible secret service officials were said to have been involved, and about which there was an information blackout after the necessary front-page photos were obtained.

Concerns about the immediate future of the United States grew even more when listening to the Democrats’ “response” speech, given by a congressman of Dominican origin, who was branded “illegal”

by some extremist Republican, who was unable to present a coherent, comprehensible proposal as an alternative to what the president had said.

One conclusion is clear: on the Republican side there is a leader with a group of unconditional (almost fanatical) followers, on the Democratic side there are several groups that do not find the coherence to present themselves as a single force, and in the middle there is the great mass of the American population that does not identify the appropriate vehicle to make their interests and objectives prosper. Let's wait for the 2026 exercise.

He said this in 1960. Until it happens, we will continue to live in "la prehistoria".

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