Livingston County Democrats

Response to State of the Union

Donald Trump launched his 2020 reelection campaign with a characteristically self-aggrandizing speech that was nothing like State of the Union addresses of the past. Using the terms “I” and “my” some 73 times – 70 more than in Obama’s last State of the Union – the President touted even legislative achievements that most members of his Party had opposed.

Just as his inaugural speech cited recent American history as “carnage,” tonight he grandiosely represented a few modest gains as the successful reversal of decades of American decline. He touted a grossly unfair $2-trillion tax cut as having ignited the American economy, when it fact it lifted economic growth only briefly in 2018, since which time business investment has actually declined. Forty-eight days after being impeached for trying to bribe a foreign government to investigate a political rival, he spoke of America being respected again.

The President spoke of a blue-collar boom at a time that the Institute of Supply Management rates the manufacturing sector as the weakest it’s been since 2009. He talked of wages raising fast, when in fact the bottom two-thirds of the workforce earns less per hour in real terms than in 1973. He called his Administration’s policies “relentlessly pro-worker,” when he has rolled back Obama-era initiatives to ensure that workers get overtime pay and can respond to wage theft by employers.

He said nothing about the long-term economic consequences of his enormous giveaways to corporations and the wealthy, about forecasts of trillion-dollar deficits for each of the next ten years. He said nothing about how he would fund a “Space Force” or a Mars initiative.

Then there were the straight-out lies, which fact-checkers will no doubt discover. He lied about health care costs. He lied about protecting Americans with preexisting medical conditions, when he and his party have backed dozens of “repeal-and-replace” bills that do no such thing. He lied about how much progress has been made on the border wall. He lied about protecting Medicare and Social Security, three weeks after saying that “we need to take a look” at cutting them. He lied about declining drug prices. He lied about “failing government schools.” And while he highlighted reductions in opioid deaths in three swing states, he failed to mention that average life expectancy in the US has fallen for three straight years. Perhaps worst of all, he characterized America as a place “where anyone can rise,” when all reputable research makes clear that American social mobility has been sharply reduced in recent years.

Perhaps most disturbing at all, he showed no desire to be the president of all of the American people. Nor did members of his party, who rose more than 35 times to applaud, at times chanting “Four More Years” and “USA, USA, USA,” transforming the address into a partisan campaign rally. Meanwhile, most Democrats stayed seated, many shaking their heads in disbelief at the President’s long string of lies and mischaracterizations.

As befits a campaign rally masquerading as a State of the Union address, the President spent nearly one-quarter of his time reassuring his base rather than trying to unite the country. He attacked attempts to broaden health coverage and reduce its cost as “socialism.” He tied a paltry increase in neonatal health care funding to banning late-term abortion. He attacked sanctuary cities and states, drawing on gruesome anecdotes; in fact, cities with more undocumented immigrants exhibit much lower crime rates than other American cities and towns. He described religious freedom as being “under siege,” and backed school prayer. Making clear just which religion he meant, he doubled down on the need to confront “radical Islamic terrorism,” just a few months after deserting our Iraqi Kurd allies in the fight against ISIS.

In a final example of throwing red meat to his base, he had the First Lady bestow the Presidential Medal of Freedom on Rush Limbaugh, his bosom buddy in his years-long campaign to “prove” that Barack Obama was not an American.

Make no mistake: America is in mortal danger. A president who lost the popular vote by nearly three million has, as he boasted, filled more than a quarter of the judiciary with hard-right judges who oppose the Constitutional separation of church and state, the right of workers to join unions and negotiate for safer and better-paid jobs, women’s right to make their own medical decisions, and the legitimacy of Congress’s attempts to enforce the Constitution’s explicit prohibition against enlisting foreign nations in domestic political contests.

Even though the economy is in reasonably good shape for many, though by no means all, Americans, the true State of the Union is badly divided, and the country ill-served by a president whose political support is predicated almost entirely on exploiting our divisions.