

7 things to watch for during Trump's joint address to Congress

Look for a more emboldened president compared to the Trump of 2017.

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POLITICO

President Donald Trump shocked the nation eight years ago when his first joint address to Congress was, well, *presidential*.

There was none of what the president now likes to call his “weaves” — digressions from his prepared remarks and other tangents. There was no bashing of the media, no name-calling of his opponents. But Trump is not the man he was in 2017. Emboldened by his sweeping victory, and still seething over the persecution he believes he suffered when he was out of office, the president has more leeway this time around. What that will mean for his address to Congress on Tuesday is anybody's guess at this point.

“TOMORROW NIGHT WILL BE BIG. I WILL TELL IT LIKE IT IS!” Trump [wrote on Truth Social](#) on Monday.

The theme of Trump's speech will be the “renewal of the American Dream,” and it will include sections on the economy, border security and foreign policy, [Fox News reported ahead of the address](#). An outside political adviser to the president, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told POLITICO the president plans a heavy emphasis on immigration, with the invited guests expected to feature people whose family members were victims of crimes committed by undocumented migrants.

It is also widely expected that the slashing of the federal bureaucracy will come up in the president's speech, as the so-called Department of Government Efficiency cuts have dominated his first month in office. And the president is expected to mention the assassination attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania, with someone who was at the rally anticipated to attend, the adviser said.

But if he goes off script? All bets are off, and anyone could find themselves in the president's crosshairs.

“He's not a sweeping orator. He tends to be a tactical orator off the prompter, and that's what I would anticipate,” said Scott Jennings, a GOP strategist who has been a vocal Trump defender on CNN and who was at one point considered for Trump's press secretary post.

Here's a look at what to watch for during the Tuesday night address, which begins at 9 p.m. ET.

1. How does Trump address people's frustrations with high prices?

Trump wasn't thrilled with talking about high prices on the campaign trail. He famously complained to his supporters at an Inauguration Day rally, "How many times can you say an apple has doubled in cost?"

That attitude has been borne out through his first month-plus in office, with the president spending more time talking about Elon Musk's efforts to dismantle the federal government and renaming the Gulf of America than he has about inflation. That focus on DOGE [has made his allies increasingly uneasy](#).

Polling shows inflation and high prices remain the top issue Americans are concerned about, and many of them don't think this administration is doing enough to address them. A [recent Reuters-Ipsos poll](#) found that 52 percent of respondents don't think Trump is doing enough to help the economy and bring down prices, and the University of Michigan's Consumer Sentiment Index [plummeted to](#) a 15-month low in February.

"Economy and illegal immigration. Those were, I believe, the two things that propelled Donald Trump to the White House for a second time, and he has to address both issues with the same verve," said Barrett Marson, a GOP strategist in Arizona. "Ignore the voter discontent on the economy at your own peril."

Expect the president to tout the U.S. manufacturing investments companies have made since he took office in January. That includes chip maker TSMC's Monday announcement that it plans to invest \$100 billion in U.S. chip plants, building on the \$500 billion investment from Apple and the \$27 billion investment from pharmaceutical manufacturer Eli Lilly announced last week. It's a move that would echo the approach he took during his first address to Congress in 2017, when he touted investments from Ford, Fiat-Chrysler, General Motors, Sprint, Softbank, Lockheed Martin, Intel, Walmart and others.

The president's allies argue that it's been only a month, and that no one expected the economy to change overnight. And they say he is addressing the economy with tariffs aimed at boosting domestic manufacturing and executive orders targeting domestic fossil fuel production, along with cuts to federal spending they argue will yield an economic benefit down the road by improving the country's fiscal health and boosting the private sector.

But it's unclear whether all of that will be enough to satisfy Americans who are still feeling the pinch of inflation on their wallets. And new tariffs, some of which took effect Tuesday, could make inflation even worse.

“Blanket tariffs make it more expensive to do business in America, driving up costs for consumers across the board,” former Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell argued in [a recent op-ed](#). “Broad-based tariffs could have long-term consequences right in our backyard.”

2. How much time does Trump spend talking about DOGE? And how does he frame Musk’s role?

Trump’s first month in office has been dominated by DOGE’s efforts to upend the federal bureaucracy, cut federal workers and unilaterally slash federal spending. Some of the president’s allies, however, fear DOGE is sucking up too much of the president’s time and attention and believe he should instead focus on passing an extension of his 2017 tax cuts, avoiding a government shutdown and addressing Americans’ concerns about inflation.

Keep an eye out for how much time the president spends talking about DOGE, as well as how he frames Musk’s role in it (a point that has been muddled over the last several weeks by the administration’s messaging both publicly and in court). Last week, administration officials confirmed that Amy Gleason, not Musk, is the administrator of DOGE, while Musk serves as a special adviser to the president.

Musk himself is set to attend the speech, a White House official, granted anonymity to share details of speech planning, said. (Whether he will wear what has become his uniform as of late — a “Dark MAGA” hat and a black “tech support” t-shirt — is unclear.)

3. How does Trump talk about the administration’s progress on mass deportations?

Immigration is one of the president’s favorite topics. During his inaugural address, he promised his administration would begin the work of deporting “millions and millions” of immigrants with criminal records. But immigration has taken an unusually low-profile role in the early weeks of his administration as officials have seen lower-than-hoped-for numbers of deportations — and Trump himself has been reportedly unhappy with the administration’s progress.

The administration has yet to release official, comprehensive deportation numbers. But [a recent Reuters report](#), referencing unpublished DHS data, found that the U.S. deported 37,660 people during Trump’s first month in office. That’s down from a monthly average of 57,000 during the last year of the Biden administration, though administration officials have disputed the latter set of numbers as “artificially high” because of higher levels of illegal immigration.

But expect immigration to once again be in the spotlight on Tuesday night, the outside Trump adviser said. A recent Harvard-Harris poll found that immigration [remains one of Americans’ top issues](#) only behind inflation, with 81 percent of respondents

supporting the deportation of immigrants who are in the country illegally and have committed crimes, including 70 percent of Democrats.

Trump is likely to focus on a second set of immigration metrics his administration considers more positive: plummeting border crossings. Trump [announced on Truth Social](#) over the weekend that 8,326 people were apprehended at the border in February, the lowest number in [at least 25 years](#) — and a fraction of the 29,000 people who were apprehended in January and the 47,000 detained in December. (It's worth noting border crossings [had already dropped significantly](#) under Biden's efforts to clamp down on asylum.)

Fox News reported the president will use the speech to push Congress to pass more border security funding to support deportations and border wall construction.

4. About that mineral deal with Ukraine ...

The [televised blowup between](#) Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office on Friday shocked much of the world and dashed hopes for a rare earth mineral deal that could have paved the way for a ceasefire. Trump, who in the run-up to the meeting had [taken to social media](#) to call Zelenskyy a “dictator,” accused the Ukrainian president of being ungrateful for U.S. support in the war and argued that he had “no cards” to play and was in “no position to make requests.”

Trump told reporters Monday afternoon that he would address whether that deal can be revived during the Tuesday night speech, saying that it would be “great” for the U.S. He's also likely to address other hot-button foreign policy topics including the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and a new trade war with Canada and Mexico, after 25 percent tariffs on the countries took effect Tuesday.

Watch to see also how he talks about the leaders of U.S. adversaries, like China President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, and those of its allies, like Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron — and which ones he name-checks.

Other topics likely to come up: the Gulf of America, buying (or otherwise negotiating a deal with) Greenland for national security and critical mineral purposes, retaking the Panama Canal and — depending on how punchy the president is feeling toward the country's neighbor to the north — making Canada the 51st state.

5. What's his message to Congress?

Trump has made clear his desire to extend his 2017 tax cuts and boost border funding. But he's largely left the details of how to do so up to Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Majority Leader John Thune. He only dipped his toe into the reconciliation waters last week when the resolution Trump has referred to as “one big, beautiful bill” appeared to

be heading for defeat in the House, [making calls that persuaded](#) some holdouts to switch their votes at the last minute.

He's now expected to use the address to push for increased border funding, though it's unclear whether he plans to also use the speech to press for his tax cuts and urge Congress to avoid a government shutdown later this month.

"I do think there's an opportunity here for him to stand in front of the Republican majority and say, 'Okay, you know, this doesn't have to be hard. I don't want to have to do this the hard way. I want to do this the easy way. So let's do that,'" Jennings said. "It wouldn't bother me if he told the Republicans in that room, 'Look, my agenda is your agenda. That's what people voted for. So I need you to join me here, and we're going to do something amazing together.'"

6. What *doesn't* Trump talk about?

Eight years ago, during his first address to Congress, Trump promised to repeal and replace Obamacare. It turned out to be an ill-fated effort that consumed much of the president's first year in office before it died a sputtering death. Now, such a proposal isn't even remotely on the table, though [cuts to state Medicaid programs are](#).

Another topic not expected to come up: abortion. This was Trump's Achilles' heel on the campaign trail, and while appointing the Supreme Court justices key to overturning *Roe v. Wade* is one of the most notable accomplishments from the president's first term in office, it is not something he wants to spend a lot of, if any, time talking about during his second. (He didn't even talk about it during that first address in 2017.)

Also, the Bible. It seems unlikely that Trump will reference Scripture as he did during his first joint address, in which he paraphrased John 15:13: "There is no greater act of love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." His second administration has overall taken a more secular turn from his first, [trading faith for "common sense" in its new culture war](#).

7. How do the Democrats respond?

Democrats [are looking to use](#) Trump's speech to highlight the impacts of his second-term policies.

Democratic lawmakers were all encouraged to bring guests who were affected either by DOGE or the House GOP's budget. They've rolled out guests like union leaders, laid-off government workers, people who could be affected by cuts to Medicaid and people affected by the federal funding freeze. Internal party messaging guidance directed lawmakers to unite around a message that said "Trump and Republicans in Congress stand with Elon Musk and billionaire donors."

It's part of a less pugilistic stance toward Trump's speech that will be just as much about his administration and Musk as it could be about the president.

Democrats aren't expecting a mass boycott like in previous years, nor are major organized protests gaining traction. Some in the party said that they wanted to be present for the speech to show that Trump still faced opposition from inside the chamber.

Still, the Democratic Women's Caucus is expected to wear pink in protest (in past years, they wore white to honor the suffragettes). And House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, in a "Dear Colleague" letter Monday evening, announced several pre- and post-speech events, including a gathering of House Democrats on the Capitol steps on Wednesday morning "for an event featuring the voices of the American people."

Jake Traylor and Nicholas Wu contributed to this report.