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## Donald Trump's fabulist address

US president's speech to Congress was pure personalism, not ideology

**EDWARD LUCE**



Donald Trump's address to Congress on Tuesday is likelier to be remembered as a spectacle than for the content of what he said © Kent Nishimura/Bloomberg

## Edward Luce

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It is Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Yet no parade could match the carnival in Donald Trump's Tuesday night speech to Congress.

As the US president declared himself author of not only the greatest comeback we have ever seen, but will probably ever see, one could almost hear the remnants of the fact-checking community snap their laptops shut. What purpose would it serve to point out that millions of dead centenarians are not receiving social security cheques, or that America has spent nowhere close to \$350bn on Ukraine?

It would be equally futile to compare Trump's address to any by his predecessors, including those he gave in his first term. This was in a category of one. In addition to being the longest by a mile in modern history, Trump's speech was a fever dream of extravagant promises. His pledge to cover America with a "golden dome" modelled on Israel's "iron dome" would use up every gold bar in Fort Knox. A few minutes earlier, [Trump](#) had promised to balance the federal budget. Was his pledge to take Greenland "one way or another" a threat or a fantasy? Ditto for the Panama Canal.

Presidents used to at least make a pretence of trying to find common ground. Trump's

speech went in the opposite direction — Joe Biden was the worst president ever; Trump was saved from the assassin's bullet by God to make America great again; all other nations, whether friend or foe, had been indefinitely ripping America off; Robert F Kennedy Jr, the new secretary of health and human services and vaccine-denier, would solve America's autism epidemic; no president in US history had achieved more than Trump in his first 43 days. And so on. He made no appeal to bipartisanship.

Two other omissions stood out. The first is that Trump avoided the laundry list of legislation that he wants passed. Presidents normally check off a list of priority bills, especially in their first address. Although Trump was speaking to Congress, America's first branch of government has never seemed less relevant. Trump's biggest hat tip in the gallery was to Elon Musk, who is busy usurping Capitol Hill's powers in spite of holding no confirmed position.

The second striking feature was the chamber's bifurcation. On one side, Republicans stood and almost continuously cheered. On the other, Democrats sat stony-faced and mostly silent, with the occasional round of boos. Many filtered out long before Trump had stopped talking. The speech's longest section was devoted to the bane of illegal immigrants. If that offers any pointers, Trump's deportation campaign looks set to intensify soon.

Anyone seeking the philosophical glue holding this speech together would have come up short. It is hard to make conventional sense of what Trump said. The elevator version is that America has entered a new golden age because Trump is back in charge. The content was neither libertarian nor traditionally conservative, or even conventionally nationalist. It was pure Trumpian personalism.

As such, it is likelier to be remembered as a spectacle than for the content of what he said. Indeed, when historians look back on March 4 2025, his speech might barely rate a footnote. Across the Atlantic, Germany's incoming chancellor, Friedrich Merz, on Tuesday declared his goal of scrapping the country's sacred debt brake in order to re-arm Germany. That, rather than golden domes or planting the stars and stripes on Mars, is an announcement to take seriously.

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