

Confident Trump prepares for State of the Union (while dealing with Russia, immigration)

WASHINGTON — After a turn on the world stage, President Trump now faces high-stakes talks over the Russia investigation, immigration, and government spending while preparing for one of the most-watched political events of the year: The State of the Union address.

Trump and his aides are exuding confidence over his prime-time address to Congress on Tuesday, even amid still-low approval ratings and the prospect of Russia testimony before Special Counsel Robert Mueller, in the wake of revelations that Trump wanted to fire Mueller back in June.

“Our economy is better than it has been in many decades,” Trump tweeted Sunday in what looked like a preview of his speech. “Businesses are coming back to America like never before ... Unemployment is nearing record lows. We are on the right track!”



Donald J. Trump

✓@realDonaldTrump

Our economy is better than it has been in many decades. Businesses are coming back to America like never before. Chrysler, as an example, is leaving Mexico and coming back to the USA. Unemployment is nearing record lows. We are on the right track!

Also offering a State of the Union teaser during last week’s visit to a global economic conference in Davos, Switzerland, Trump said: “The world is witnessing the resurgence of a strong and prosperous America.”

A year and a week after being sworn into office, Trump offers a state of the union while facing a number of pivotal events that could affect his presidency. They include:

RUSSIA TESTIMONY

Attorneys for Trump and Mueller are negotiating a possible interview of the president, a sign that at least part of the special counsel's investigation is approaching an end.

Mueller's team is probing any links between Trump's campaign and Russians who sought to influence the 2016 presidential election via stolen emails and fake news about Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton.

Mueller is also looking into claims that Trump might have sought to obstruct the investigation through actions that included the May dismissal of FBI Director James Comey, and perhaps a planned dismissal of Mueller himself.

As Trump spoke with economic leaders in Davos, *The New York Times* reported that Trump actually ordered Mueller's firing in June, but backed off only after White House Counsel Don McGahn threatened to resign over the move.

Trump derided the story as "fake news," but officials familiar with the investigation told USA TODAY the president discussed firing Mueller fired back in June, but attorneys and aides talked him out of it.

Since then, they said, the president has cooperated with the special counsel's office. While aides say Trump has is frustrated over the Russia investigation, he and they remain confident it will end soon and show he engaged in no wrongdoing.

During an impromptu Q-and-A with reporters at the White House last week, Trump said he is looking forward to testifying and willing to do so under oath.

His lawyers, however, said the interview remains subject to negotiations on the circumstances of the testimony, including time limits and areas of questioning as well as whether the interview would be conducted under oath.

Trump is not expected to address the Russia probe during his State of the Union, but other aspects of the probe are likely to come up.

ANOTHER GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN?

Congress ended a three-day shutdown a week ago by passing a new temporary spending plan, but it expires on Feb. 8, just a week from Thursday.

Budget negotiations involving the White House and congressional Republicans and Democrats center on the same issue that led to the first shutdown, immigration.

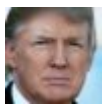
IMMIGRATION TALKS

While Trump spoke in Davos, his aides unveiled an immigration plan calling for tighter security provisions at the border, including a \$25 billion trust fund for his long-advocated wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The Trump administration is also seeking to meet Democratic demands by reviving the program known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and to block deportation of “DREAMers,” young people brought into the United States illegally by their parents.

The administration’s proposed plan includes a path to citizenship for up to 1.8 million people who qualify under DACA, a provision drawing catcalls from conservative Republicans who say it amounts to amnesty for law breakers.

Some Democrats, meanwhile, said the plan’s call to restrict family-based migration and other programs are designed to restrict currently legal immigration, especially for Hispanics. “They are part of the Trump administration’s unmistakable campaign to make America white again,” said House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi.



Donald J. Trump

✓@realDonaldTrump

I have offered DACA a wonderful deal, including a doubling in the number of recipients & a twelve year pathway to citizenship, for two reasons: (1) Because the Republicans want to fix a long time terrible problem. (2) To show that

Democrats do not want to solve DACA, only use it!

Trump and aides hope his State of the Union address will launch a second-year agenda that includes a major infrastructure program, new trade rules with other countries, and more federal de-regulation, as well as immigration and a military build-up.

Technically, this is Trump's first formal State of the Union address. The new president did speak back in February to a joint session of Congress, but that was billed as an address to Congress because new presidents aren't expected to know the true state of the union.

While Trump sees the speech as a chance to jump-start his presidency, others are skeptical that a single address can do much.

*After a year of contentiousness ranging from health care to a nuclear stand-off with North Korea, the **Real Clear Politics** website collection of polls gives Trump an average job approval rating of 40%.*

Princeton historian Julian Zelizer said Trump comes into the State of the Union with "two great assets:" A "roaring economy" and Republican majorities in the House and Senate that have largely stood with him even in times of trouble.

"But his approval ratings are very low, the (Mueller) investigation is more serious than ever, Democrats remain energized with good numbers going into the midterm, and his legislative record is thin," Zelizer said. "His perception of strength does not reflect the overall reality of his situation.

"If the past is any guide, something new will happen after Trump's speech.

Trump's address to Congress in February drew good reviews. But days later, he set off a new firestorm by tweeting the unsubstantiated claim that predecessor Barack Obama "had my 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower just before victory.

"In the months since, Trump has often stepped on his own message, whether it's applying barnyard-like descriptions to African countries or expressing seemingly sympathetic comments about white nationalists who marched in Charlottesville, Va.

in one of the planned follow-ups to Trump's State of the Union, talk show host

Jimmy Kimmel plans to interview Stormy Daniels, the adult film actress who claims to have had an affair in the past with the president.

Source: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/01/28/confident-trump-prepares-state-union-while-dealing-russia-immigration/1072122001/>

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