

AP FACT CHECK: Trump's claims in his State of Union address

Associated Press, Feb, 1, 2018

WASHINGTON (AP) — The AP is fact-checking remarks from President Donald Trump's State of the Union speech. Here's a look at some of the claims we've examined (quotations from the speech as delivered or as released by the White House before delivery):

WAGE GAINS



President Donald Trump on rising wages

TRUMP: "After years and years of wage stagnation, we are finally seeing rising wages."

THE FACTS: Actually, they are not rising any faster than they have before. Average hourly pay rose 2.5 percent in 2017, slightly slower than the 2.9 percent increase recorded in 2016.

Most economists say wages should increase at a faster rate as the unemployment rate drops. The unemployment rate stands at a 17-year low of 4.1 percent, but that has done little so far to spark rising wages.

The last time unemployment was this low, in the late 1990s, average hourly pay was rising at a 4 percent pace.

DIVERSITY VISAS

TRUMP: "The third pillar (of my immigration plan) ends the visa lottery — a program that randomly hands out green cards without any regard to skill, merit or the safety of our people."

THE FACTS: That's a highly misleading characterization. The program is not nearly that random and it does address skills, merit and safety.

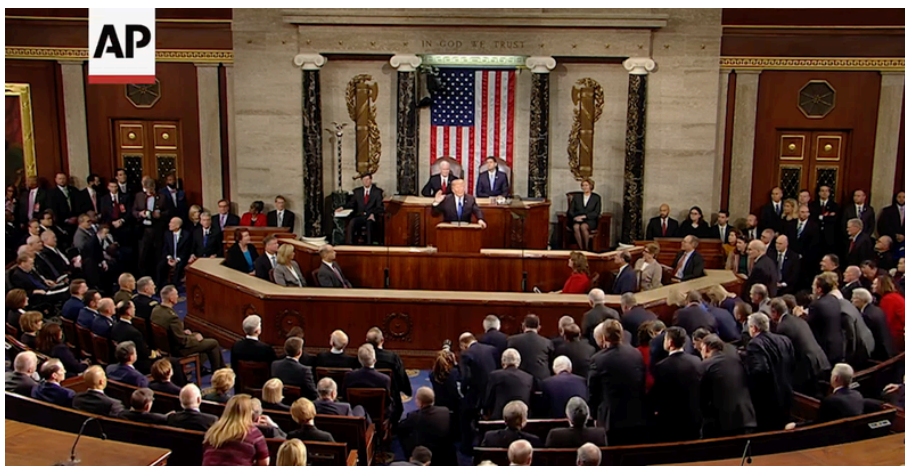


President Donald Trump talked about business moving to the U.S., chain migration, energy exports and the Islamic State group. We break down the facts. (Jan. 30)

The diversity visa program awards up to 50,000 green cards a year to people from underrepresented countries, largely in Africa. It requires applicants to have completed a high school education or have at least two years of experience in the last five years in a selection of fields identified by the Labor Department.

Winners are then randomly selected by computer, from that pool of applicants who met the pre-conditions. Winners must submit to extensive background checks, just like any other immigrant.

COAL



President Donald Trump on energy

TRUMP: "We have ended the war on beautiful clean coal."

THE FACTS: Coal is not clean. According to the Energy Department, more than 83 percent of all major air pollutants — sulfur dioxide, carbon dioxide, toxic mercury and

dangerous soot particles — from power plants are from coal, even though coal makes up only 43 percent of the power generation. Power plants are the No. 1 source of those pollutants.

Coal produces nearly twice as much heat-trapping carbon dioxide per energy created as natural gas, the department says.

In 2011, coal burning emitted more than 6 million tons of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides versus 430,000 tons from other energy sources combined.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION



In this Dec. 6, 2017, file photo, demonstrators hold up balloons during an immigration rally in support of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), programs, near the U.S. Capitol in Washington. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana, File)

TRUMP: “The first pillar of our framework generously offers a path to citizenship for 1.8 million illegal immigrants who were brought here by their parents at a young age — that covers almost three times more people than the previous administration.”

THE FACTS: Not so. The Obama administration pushed legal status for many more immigrants and was prevented by Congress and the courts from offering it. A 2013 bill that passed the Senate but died in the House would have bestowed legal status on about 8 million people, according to a Congressional Budget Office estimate.

In 2014, the Obama administration announced an expanded program that included parents of young immigrants who were shielded from deportation under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. According to the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute, the measure would have given legal status to up to 4 million people. The Supreme Court deadlocked on the plan, letting a lower court ruling stand that

blocked it.

Read a previous AP Fact Check on the [Trump administration's immigration enforcement](#) .

TERRORISTS

TRUMP: "In the past, we have foolishly released hundreds and hundreds of dangerous terrorists only to meet them again on the battlefield, including the ISIS leader, (Abu Bakr) al-Baghdadi, who we captured, who we had, who we released."

THE FACTS: Trump is correct that al-Baghdadi had been released after being detained at Abu Ghraib and Camp Bucca, U.S. detention facilities in Iraq. But Trump made his comment while announcing that he had signed an executive order to keep open the controversial U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. If he meant that "hundreds and hundreds" of Guantanamo detainees had been released only to return to the battlefield, his math is off.

The office of the Director of National Intelligence said this summer in its most recent report on the subject that of the 728 detainees who have been released from Guantanamo, 122 are "confirmed" and 90 are "suspected" of re-engaging in hostile activities.

MS-13

TRUMP: "We have sent thousands and thousands and thousands of MS-13 horrible people out of this country or into our prisons."

THE FACTS: That's an exaggeration and goes beyond how even how Attorney General Jeff Sessions, the Trump administration's most aggressive anti-gang enforcer, characterizes the scope of the effort.

Sessions said in a speech this week that federal authorities had secured the convictions of nearly 500 human traffickers and 1,200 gang members, "and worked with our international allies to arrest or charge more than 4,000 MS-13 members." On other occasions, the attorney general has specifically said the 4,000 number reflects work done with "our partners in Central America."

That suggests that at least some of the MS-13 members Trump is referring to weren't actually in the U.S when they were arrested, and aren't now in U.S. prisons.

OPIOIDS



This Aug. 15, 2017 photo shows an arrangement of pills of the opioid oxycodone-acetaminophen in New York. (AP Photo/Patrick Sison, File)

TRUMP: Changes in immigration policies, including more border security, “will also support our response to the terrible crisis of opioid and drug addiction.”

THE FACTS: Drugs being brought across borders are only part of the problem contributing to the nation’s opioid crisis.

According to the U.S. Centers on Disease Control and Prevention, about 40 percent of the opioid deaths in 2016 involved prescription painkillers. Those drugs are made by pharmaceutical companies. Some are abused by the people who have prescriptions; others are stolen and sold on the black market.

The flow of heroin into the U.S. from Mexico is a major problem, but drugs that are brought from other countries don’t all come over land borders. Illicit versions of powerful synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, which are a major factor in rising overdose numbers, are being shipped directly to the U.S. from China.

TRUMP: “My administration is committed to fighting the drug epidemic and helping get treatment for those in need.”

THE FACTS: The bipartisan National Governors Association doesn’t think he’s lived up to that commitment. Earlier this month, the governors called on Trump and Congress to do more to pay for and coordinate a response to the opioid epidemic.

The Trump administration has allowed states to begin allowing states to seek permission to use Medicaid to cover addiction treatment in larger facilities — a measure advocates say is needed.

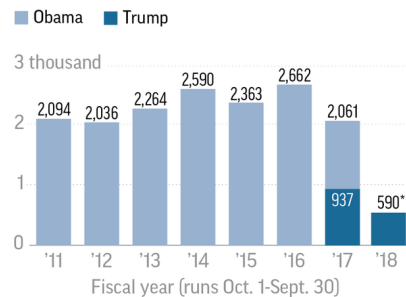
Read a previous AP Fact Check on [past anti-drug campaigns](#) ,

VETERANS

TRUMP: “Last year, the Congress passed, and I signed, the landmark VA Accountability Act. Since its passage, my administration has already removed more than 1,500 VA employees who failed to give our veterans the care they deserve.”

VA terminations

Number fired for disciplinary or performance reasons from the Department of Veterans Affairs:



*As of Jan. 24

SOURCES: Dept. of Veterans Affairs; Office of Personnel Management **AP**

THE FACTS: This statement is inaccurate. It's true that more than 1,500 firings at the VA have occurred so far during the Trump administration. But more than 500 of those firings occurred from Jan. 20, when Trump took office, to late June, when the new accountability law began to take effect. That means roughly one-third of the 1,500 firings cannot be attributed to the new law.

Congress passed the legislation last June making it easier to fire VA employees and shortening the time employees have to challenge disciplinary actions. But the law's impact on improving accountability at the department remains unclear: More VA employees were fired in former President Barack Obama's last budget year, for instance, than in Trump's first.

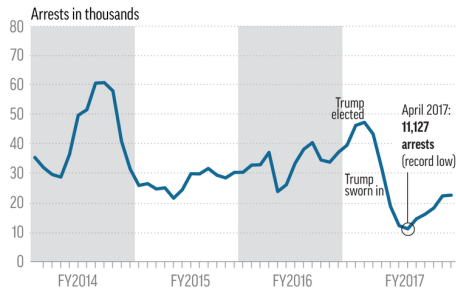
Read a previous AP Fact Check on Trump's claims of success improving [care for veterans](#) .

BORDER SECURITY

TRUMP: “For decades, open borders have allowed drugs and gangs to pour into our most vulnerable communities.”

THE FACTS: “Open borders” is an exaggeration. Border arrests, a useful if imperfect gauge of illegal crossings, have dropped sharply over the last decade.

Southwest border arrests by month



Source: Department of Homeland Security

AP

The government under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama roughly doubled the ranks of the Border Patrol, and Bush extended fencing to cover nearly one-third of the border during his final years in office. The Obama administration deported more than 2 million immigrants during the eight years he was in office, more than in previous administrations.

Studies over several years have found immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than people born in the United States.

FAMILY IMMIGRATION



Trump said in the #SOTU that an immigrant can bring "virtually unlimited numbers of distant relatives" into the U.S. In fact, the waiting list is so long, this doesn't happen much. Learn more in an #APFactCheck: <http://apne.ws/N1SjhzQ>

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TRUMP: "Under the current broken system, a single immigrant can bring in virtually unlimited numbers of distant relatives."

THE FACTS: It's not happening because the waiting list is so long.

There is currently no wait for U.S. citizens to bring spouses, children under 21 and parents. But citizens must petition for siblings and adult children, and green-card card holders must do the same for spouses and children.

On Nov. 1, there were 4 million people in line for family-based visas, according to the State Department. The waits are longest for China, India, Mexico and the Philippines. In January, Mexican siblings of U.S. children who applied in November 1997 were getting called, a wait of more than 20 years.

An immigrant could theoretically bring an uncle by bringing a parent who then brings his sibling, but the wait would be interminable for most.

OBAMA'S HEALTH LAW



Is the individual mandate gone from Obamacare, as Trump said in the #SOTU? No, not yet. Get the details in this #APFactCheck: <http://apne.ws/gZMu24F>

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TRUMP: "We repealed the core of the disastrous Obamacare — the individual mandate is now gone."

THE FACTS: No, it's not gone. It's going, in 2019. People who go without insurance this year are still subject to fines.

Congress did repeal the unpopular requirement that most Americans carry insurance or risk a tax penalty but that takes effect next year.

It's a far cry from what Trump and the GOP-led Congress set out to do last year, which was to scrap most of the sweeping Obama-era health law and replace it with a Republican alternative. The GOP blueprint would have left millions more Americans uninsured, making it even more unpopular than "Obamacare."

Other major parts of the overhaul remain in place, including its Medicaid expansion, protections for people with pre-existing conditions, guaranteed "essential" health benefits, and subsidized private health insurance for people with modest incomes. Read a previous AP Fact Check on Trump's claims of [dismantling "Obamacare."](#)

AUTOS



Trump says car companies are expanding in the U.S. for the first time in decades. Is that true? Here's our #APFactCheck: <http://apne.ws/sA9YWnl>

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TRUMP: "Many car companies are now building and expanding plants in the United States — something we have not seen for decades."

THE FACTS: He's wrong about recent decades. The auto industry has regularly been opening and expanding factories since before he became president. Toyota opened its Mississippi factory in 2011. Hyundai's plant in Alabama dates to 2005. In 2010, Tesla fully acquired and updated an old factory to produce its electric vehicles. Trump also declared that "Chrysler is moving a major plant from Mexico to Michigan." That's not exactly the case, either. Chrysler announced it will move production of heavy-duty pickup trucks from Mexico to Michigan, but the plant is not closing in Mexico. It will start producing other vehicles for global sales and no change in its workforce is anticipated.

ISLAMIC STATE



Airstrikes target Islamic State positions in Mosul, Iraq, in July. (AP Photo/Felipe Dana)

TRUMP: “Last year I pledged that we would work with our allies to extinguish ISIS from the face of the earth. One year later, I’m proud to report that the coalition to defeat ISIS has liberated almost 100 percent of the territory once held by these killers in Iraq and Syria. But there is much more work to be done. We will continue our fight until ISIS is defeated.”

THE FACTS: Although it’s true that the Islamic State has lost nearly 100 percent of the territory it held in Syria and Iraq when the U.S. began airstrikes in both countries in 2014, Syria remains wracked by civil war, with much of that country controlled by the government of Russian ally Syrian President Bashar Assad and not by U.S.-allied groups. The Iraqi government has declared itself fully liberated from IS.

The progress cited by Trump did not start with his presidency. The U.S.-led coalition recaptured much land, including several key cities in Iraq, before he took office. And the assault on Mosul, which was the extremists’ main stronghold in northern Iraq, was begun during the Obama administration. But in the past year the counter-ISIS campaign has accelerated, based largely on the approach Trump inherited.

He’s right that more remains to be done to eliminate IS as an extremist threat, even after it has been defeated militarily. The group is still able to inspire attacks in the West based on its ideology, and it is trying to make inroads in places like Afghanistan and Libya.

MIDDLE-CLASS TAXES



President Donald Trump displays the \$1.5 trillion tax overhaul package he signed, Friday, Dec. 22, 2017, in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci, File)

TRUMP: “Our massive tax cuts provide tremendous relief for the middle class and small businesses.”

THE FACTS: That depends on how you define “tremendous.” The biggest beneficiaries from the tax law are wealthy Americans and corporations.

Most Americans will pay less in taxes this year. The nonpartisan Tax Policy Center estimates that about 80 percent of U.S. households will get a tax cut, with about 15 percent seeing little change and 5 percent paying more.

Middle-class households — defined as those making between roughly \$49,000 and \$86,000 a year — will see their tax bills drop by about \$930, the Tax Policy Center calculates. That will lift their after-tax incomes by 1.6 percent.

The richest 1 percent, meanwhile, will save \$51,140, lifting their after-tax incomes by 3.4 percent, or more than twice as much as the middle class.

ENERGY EXPORTS



In this July 12, 2017, file photo the Valero Benicia Refinery in Benicia, Calif. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File)

TRUMP: “We are now an exporter of energy to the world.”

THE FACTS: There’s nothing new in that: The U.S. has long exported all sorts of energy, while importing even more. If Trump meant that the U.S. has become a net exporter of energy, he’s rushing things along. The U.S. Energy Information Administration projects that the U.S. will become a net energy exporter in the next decade, primarily because of a boom in oil and gas production that began before Trump’s presidency. The Trump White House has predicted that could happen sooner, by 2020. But that’s not “now.”

TAX CUTS



In this photo March 22, 2013, file photo, the exterior of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) building in Washington. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh, File)

TRUMP: “We enacted the biggest tax cuts and reform in American history.”

THE FACTS: No truer now than in the countless other times he has said the same. The December tax overhaul ranks behind Ronald Reagan’s in the early 1980s, post-World War II tax cuts and at least several more.

An analysis by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget in the fall put Trump’s package as the eighth biggest since 1918. As a percentage of the total economy, Reagan’s 1981 cut is the biggest followed by the 1945 rollback of taxes that financed World War II.

Valued at \$1.5 trillion over 10 years, the plan is indeed large and expensive. But it’s much smaller than originally intended. Back in the spring, it was shaping up as a \$5.5 trillion package. Even then it would have only been the third largest since 1940 as a share of gross domestic product.

Read a previous AP Fact Check on Trump’s claim that his tax cuts are the biggest

ever.

WORKER BONUSES



This July 27, 2017, file photo shows an AT&T logo at a store in Hialeah, Fla. (AP Photo/Alan Diaz, File)

TRUMP: “Since we passed tax cuts, roughly 3 million workers have already gotten tax cut bonuses — many of them thousands of dollars per worker.”

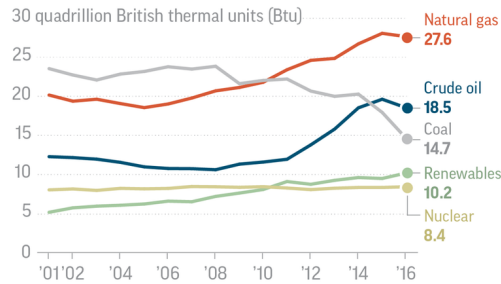
THE FACTS: This appears to be true, but may not be as impressive as it sounds. According to a tally of public announcements by Americans for Tax Reform, a conservative group that supported the tax law, about 3 million workers have gotten bonuses, raises or larger payments to their retirement accounts since the tax law was signed.

That’s about 2 percent of the more than 154 million Americans with jobs. The Labor Department said before the tax package was signed into law that 38 percent of workers would likely get some form of bonus in 2017.

Few companies have granted across-the-board pay raises, which Trump and GOP leaders promised would result from the cut in corporate tax rates included in the overhaul. Many, such as Walmart and BB&T Bank, said they will raise their minimum wages. Walmart made similar announcements in 2015 and 2016.

ENERGY PRODUCTION

US energy production since 2001



SOURCE: Energy Information Administration

AP

TRUMP: “We have ended the war on American energy - and we have ended the war on clean coal.”

THE FACTS: Energy production was unleashed in past administrations, particularly Barack Obama’s, making accusations of a “war on energy” hard to sustain. Advances in hydraulic fracturing before Trump became president made it economical to tap vast reserves of natural gas. Oil production also greatly increased, reducing imports.

Before the 2016 presidential election, the U.S. for the first time in decades was getting more energy domestically than it imports. Before Obama, George W. Bush was no adversary of the energy industry.

One of Trump’s consequential actions as president on this front was to approve the Keystone XL pipeline — a source of foreign oil, from Canada.

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