

Opinion

‘I Keep My Promises,’ Trump Said. Let’s Check.

Here’s a report card on whether the president met his 2016 campaign pledges.

By Nicholas Kristof

Opinion Columnist

Sept. 5, 2020

Four years ago as a candidate, President Trump made more than 280 campaign promises. Let’s see how he did:

“I will build a great, great wall on our southern border ...” (speech, June 16, 2015)

While Trump so far has built 307 miles of walls along the 1,984-mile border, much of this replaces previous barriers that were dilapidated or blocked only vehicles.

“... and I will have Mexico pay for that wall.”

Mexico is not paying for it. The new wall is costing about \$30 million per mile and will be expensive to maintain, for human smugglers have cut open the wall with \$50 cordless saws.

“We will find them [all undocumented immigrants], we will get them out.” (CNN interview, July 29, 2015)

Trump deported about 750,000 undocumented immigrants in his first three years in office, but most were trying to get into the country, not already living here. He never tried to remove all undocumented immigrants. He did unleash a reign of terror directed at migrants, including separating young children from family members, and that may be one reason the total number of undocumented immigrants fell slightly. Still, Trump actually deported fewer people in his first three years than Barack Obama had — a comparison neither man will appreciate.

“We will also be a country of law and order. ... The crime and violence that today afflicts our nation will soon, and I mean very soon, come to an end. Beginning on Jan. 20 of 2017, safety will be restored.” (Speech, July 21, 2016)

Trump himself implicitly acknowledges that he has failed to create law and order, saying, “There is violence and danger in the streets” (speech, Aug. 27, 2020). Periodically, he incites that violence.

“The most basic duty of government is to defend the lives of its own citizens. Any government that fails to do so is a government unworthy to lead.” (speech, July 21, 2016)

The United States has lost more than 185,000 people to the coronavirus pandemic. On a per-capita basis, that’s more than twice as many as Canada and five times as many as Germany. America has 4 percent of the world’s population and 22 percent of the world’s confirmed Covid-19 deaths.

“We’re going to work with all of our students who are drowning in debt to take the pressure off these young people.” (speech, July 21, 2016)

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Credit...Carolyn Kaster/Associated Press

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“We’re going to work with all of our students who are drowning in debt to take the pressure off these young people.” ([speech](#), July 21, 2016)

Trump has [sought](#) to alter the terms of student loan repayments so that students would have to pay an additional \$200 billion over a decade. He also attempted [to cancel](#) the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

“We will repeal and replace disastrous Obamacare.” ([speech](#), July 21, 2016)

Trump has not succeeded in repealing the Affordable Care Act, although he is still pursuing a lawsuit that would overturn it. He has never explained what would replace it.

“You’re going to have great health care at a much lower price. It will cost the United States nothing.” ([remarks](#), July 27, 2018)

Partly because of Trump’s assaults on the Affordable Care Act, the number of uninsured people in the United States [has risen](#) for the first time in a decade. An additional [400,000 children](#) are without insurance.

“I will be the greatest jobs president that God ever created.” ([speech](#), June 16, 2015)

Job creation continued during the Trump administration at roughly the same rate as in the Obama administration, but the pandemic ended that. There are now almost [five million](#) fewer Americans with jobs than when Trump took office. In raw numbers, this is the worst jobs record of any modern president.

“It is time to drain the swamp in Washington, D.C. This is why I’m proposing a package of ethics reforms to make our government honest once again.” ([remarks](#), Oct. 17, 2016)

[Eight](#) of Trump’s associates have been charged with or convicted of crimes. Nonpartisan ethics watchdogs have repeatedly accused Trump and members of his administration and his family of serious ethics violations, and the Manhattan district attorney [suggested](#) last month that he was investigating Trump and his company for “possibly extensive and protracted criminal conduct.”

“I’m going to put in ... great conservative judges.” ([remarks](#), March 20, 2016)

Trump has appointed conservative (and young) judges across the federal bench, and this will be a major element of his legacy. He was helped by the Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell, who blocked Obama from filling vacancies; Trump thus inherited an unusually large number of positions to fill.

“We will honor the American people with the truth, and nothing else.” ([speech](#), July 21, 2016)

Trump has made more than 20,000 false or misleading statements since assuming office, by [the count](#) of The Washington Post

“We will build the roads, highways, bridges, tunnels, airports and the railways of tomorrow.” ([remarks](#), July 21, 2016)

Trump never tried to pass an infrastructure bill.

“We’re going to cut taxes for the middle class. ... We will ensure that the benefits are focused on the middle class, the working men and women, not the highest-income earners.” ([speech](#), Sept. 27, 2017)

Trump did pass a tax cut, but it was focused on the wealthy. The nonpartisan Tax Policy Center [estimated](#) that for the 2018 tax year, 20 percent of the benefits would go to the top 1 percent, and that by 2027, 82 percent of the benefits would go to the top 1 percent.

“We’ve got to get rid of the \$19 trillion in debt. ... I could do it fairly quickly ... over a period of eight years.” ([interview](#), March 31, 2016)

The debt has surged and may soon be larger than the American economy for the first time [since 1946](#). That’s partly because of his tax cut for the wealthy and partly because of Covid-19.

“We will end our chronic trade deficits.” ([remarks](#), Oct. 15, 2016)

The [trade deficit](#) is [larger now](#) than it was in Obama’s [last year](#) in office.

“We will completely rebuild our depleted military. ... We will take care of our great veterans.” ([speech](#), July 21, 2016)

Trump has increased the military budget, although he has also [taken](#) military funds for his wall. He [expanded](#) a program signed into law by Obama for veterans to choose private doctors, while reportedly scorning those who died in wars as [“suckers”](#) and trying to keep amputees from participating in a military parade.

“We are going to defeat the barbarians of ISIS.” ([speech](#), July 21, 2016)

The United States did overthrow the caliphate of the Islamic State — a process begun under Obama. But ISIS continues to operate at a reduced level.

“We want to create peace between Israel and the Palestinians. We will get it done.” ([remarks](#), May 3, 2017)

Peace between Israel and the Palestinians is as elusive as ever. However, Arab states such as the United Arab Emirates have warmed to Israel.

“Nobody will be pushing us around.” ([speech](#), June 16, 2015)

The obvious exception is Russia, which interfered in the 2016 presidential election and now appears to be interfering in the 2020 election as well. Russia has injured American troops in Syria, and it is said to have paid bounties to Afghan militants for killing American troops.

“Unlike so many who came before me, I keep my promises.” ([speech](#), Feb. 4, 2020)

Well, no.

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