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Focus

TRUMP WALL FACES BIG REALITY CHECK

President Donald Trump's vow to accelerate construction of a "contiguous, physical wall" along the Mexican border is slamming into a Washington reality - who's going to pay for it and how? Not us, say the Mexicans. Instead, US taxpayers will foot the bill, starting with money already in the Department of Homeland Security account that amounts to a small down payment. Then it's up to the Republican-led Congress to come up with \$12 billion to \$15 billion more, according to an estimate offered by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on Thursday from a GOP issues retreat in Philadelphia.

GOP leaders refused to commit to paying for the wall with spending cuts elsewhere in the budget. That could mean costs would be paid for by adding to the government's \$20 trillion debt. Press Secretary Sean Spicer Thursday floated the idea of a 20 percent tariff on Mexican imports. On Wednesday, Trump promised "immediate construction" would begin on the border wall, telling ABC News that planning is starting immediately. He again vowed that Mexico would pay the US back, though he offered no details.

It is true there is a small amount available now in the Department of Homeland Security accounts dedicated to "border security fencing, infrastructure, and technology" - \$100 million, by one congressional estimate - that would permit work to get immediately under way. So far, thanks to spending in the late 2000s, Congress has provided about \$2.3 billion to construct 654 miles of fencing and vehicular blockades. But Trump has promised a wall, not just fencing, and it's not a universally popular idea by any stretch.

"The facts have not changed. Building a wall is the most expensive and least effective way to secure the border," said GOP Rep Will Hurd, whose sprawling West Texas swing district encompasses more than 800 miles of the border. "Many areas in my district are perfect examples of where a wall is unnecessary and would negatively impact the environment, private property rights and economy." GOP members of the appropriations committees are more likely to take a green eyeshade approach to the money since they are familiar with the likely trade-offs.

Complications

"There's any number of complications," said Rep Harold Rogers, former House Appropriations Committee Chairman, citing obstacles such as Indian reservations and national parks and forests. And much of the remaining 1,300 miles is very rough terrain, with steep construction costs and a limited return for the dollar. "It's expensive and it's complicated." Hundreds of miles of the border are so rugged and inhospitable that it doesn't make sense to even try to build.

And in Texas, almost all of the land along the border is privately owned. When former President George W. Bush tried to build border fencing starting in 2006, he faced stiff opposition from local ranchers and farmers, many of whom took the government to court on plans to use their land. In many areas along the Rio Grande the fencing is built well inside the United States, as far as a mile north of the Rio Grande, to ensure that the structure doesn't interfere with the flow of the river or is built on solid ground. The middle of the channel marks the internal border and a 1970 treaty with Mexico requires that structures built there not interfere with water flow.

"We have built a fence along the border almost as much as we possibly can without violating tribal laws, environmental requirements, and taking over peoples' personal, private property," said Michelle Mrdeza, who worked for the House Appropriations panel during the fence debate of the mid-2000s. The existing blockade - roughly 350 miles to block pedestrians and 300 miles to block vehicles - has already been built along the southern border. That fencing was built in the areas that are most vulnerable to illegal crossings.

"Insofar as the problem is a physical barrier, we've basically addressed that issue," said Rep David Price, who chaired the congressional panel that funded the border fence when Democrats controlled Congress. "This focus, this fixation on a wall and pouring untold billions of dollars into a wall, is foolishness."

Cost estimates prepared a decade ago already varied widely. A 2009 Government Accountability Office analysis put costs at \$6.5 million a mile for pedestrian fencing and \$1.8 million per mile for vehicular blockades. An actual wall constructed of concrete and steel would be more costly and difficult. Trump has repeatedly promised that Mexico will pay for his wall, though neither he nor his allies in Congress are able to articulate how. — AP

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Washington Watch

TRUMP'S EXAGGERATIONS GROUNDED IN BIAS

By Dr James J Zogby

By now, Donald Trump's penchant for exaggeration and self-promotion has become well-established. Whether born of a form of pathological narcissism or just plain hucksterism, his need to claim that everything he does is the biggest and best is unsettling and, at times, embarrassing. Most troubling is the concern that Trump may actually believe his non-factual boasts - that because his ego is so needy he cannot accept reality. This is clearly not a comforting quality for a commander-in-chief.

During his first week in office, this weakness has been on full public display. Whether in his weirdly vainglorious address before the CIA, his first interview with a major TV network, or on Twitter - the new president has spent way too much time trying to convince the public (and maybe himself?) that his crowds were "the largest in history", that the applause he received at the CIA set a record, and that massive unprecedented voter fraud was the reason he didn't receive more votes than his opponent.

That all these claims are probably untrue doesn't appear to register with the White House. When challenged by media fact-checkers, the president and his staff become belligerent, striking back at the offending reporters with threats to have their access denied and future questions unanswered. More recently, a top White House aide referred to the questioning media as "the enemy". It appears that in the mind of the President and company, the exaggerations and fabrications must be believed - or else!

What we've also learned during this first week of the Trump Administration is that the president's penchant for exaggeration or use of "alternative facts" would also be used to advance his agenda. In signing critical executive orders, the new president has made his case for radical policy changes on immigration, refugees, and voter fraud by presenting "evidence" of

problems that are either wildly exaggerated or just plain "made up".

To justify building a wall between the US and Mexico, for example, Trump argued that the number of migrants illegally "pouring across the border has increased in recent years and that "all across the country" Americans have been victims of violent crimes perpetrated by these "illegals". In fact, the numbers of undocumented individuals entering the US has dramatically declined in recent years and while there certainly have been crimes committed by undocumented immigrants, their numbers are minuscule in relation to the overall violent crime rate. But truth doesn't matter. It is the White House's hope that by exploiting fear and resentment of Latino immigrants they may generate enough support to build the wall and deport millions of undocumented.

False claims

To make the case for putting a freeze on the US refugee program and banning Muslim immigration from a list of largely Arab countries, Trump's executive order falsely claims that "numerous foreign-born individuals have been convicted or implicated in terrorism-related crimes since September 11, 2001...". This "fact" is also an exaggeration creating the impression that are large number of foreign-born persons who have been involved in US-based acts of terror. The actual number of such individuals that have been convicted of terror-related charges is less than 40 (with a substantial portion of these being cases of FBI entrapment). But once again, the truth doesn't matter, since the White House believes that fear of and bias against Muslim will provide them with enough support to restrict the entry of Muslims and cut the overall number of refugee admissions in half.

Likewise, to back up the claim that there is a need to more closely scrutinize voter rolls and place greater

restrictions on voting procedures, President Trump has made the claim that three to five million persons voted illegally in the last election. To buttress his case, he and his staff have cited studies, the authors of which deny that their work shows any evidence of massive voter fraud. While there is no real justification for the President to make the claim of massive voter fraud, truth doesn't matter. What counts is there is a fear of "minority voters" swaying elections - and that will be enough to provide some backing to Republican efforts to further their voter suppression agenda - making it more difficult for the poor, the elderly, and minority groups to vote.

Prejudice

What Trump has learned is that "he can fool some of the people all of the time". He has built his case for policy change by projecting arguments that prey on fear and prejudice - against Latinos, African Americans, and Arabs and Muslims. Fear and prejudice helped him win an election and so far they appear to be giving him just enough edge to radically transform US immigration and refugee policy and the place new and onerous restrictions on how Americans vote.

The question that remains is can the President continue on his merry way and be able to "fool all of the people all of the time"? I think not. While he may, for a short time, get away with exaggerations and fabrication about groups that his supporters fear, I think his ultimate undoing will be his fragile ego and its inability to accept reality. The bizarre rants he kept repeating all week about how big his audiences were and how beloved he is indicate an excessive neediness and a lack of control that may lead him to take an embarrassing step too far.

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute

BOLT CAN'T OUTFRAN JAMAICA DOPING PROBLEM

It was bound to happen. Even the least-cynical track fan could peer through the smoke screen that enveloped Jamaica's anti-doping program and recognize things weren't right. Eventually, that was bound to ensnare Usain Bolt, the spirit-lifting superstar whose reach goes well beyond his own island but who is still losing one of his nine Olympic golds because of the problems down there. On Wednesday, the International Olympic Committee stripped Jamaica's 2008 Olympic 4x100 relay team of its gold medal. The 37.1-second trip around the track, a world record at the time, goes off the books, too.

It all has to do with Nesta Carter, a bit player on the Jamaican sprint scene who was caught taking a banned stimulant that was detected in re-analysis of samples the IOC has been holding since the Beijing Games. Carter joins a growing list of Jamaican champions who have been busted for doping over the last several years: Yohan Blake, Asafa Powell, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Sherone Simpson. Details of all these cases vary, most have been explained away. None, on their own, stand out as major affronts to the anti-doping system, the likes of which have been documented in the disturbing case against the Russian sports machine.

And yet, all have this in common: Had Jamaica been running a no-excuses anti-doping system for the last 10-15 years, no athlete would've felt secure pushing the envelope with banned

stimulants or any other such substance. And Bolt might still have his medal. A few years ago, Renee Anne Shirley, the one-time executive of Jamaica's anti-doping agency who was ousted suddenly and without much explanation in 2013, offered this shocking statistic: In the five months leading to the London Olympics, Jamaica's anti-doping agency conducted a grand total of one out-of-competition drug test.

Conflicts

"It wasn't good," said David Howman, the former World Anti-Doping Agency director general who played a role in Jamaica's many reboots. "The only testing effectively done in relation to Jamaica was done by the IAAF (track's governing body). The problem there was the testing was done in Jamaica by people who had conflicts. There were some issues."

It's not that people didn't try to help. In 2010, at WADA's urging, Jamaica's anti-doping board was dissolved to rid it of people who also led sports associations on the island - a basic conflict of inter-

est that should've been dealt with years sooner. The folks at the US Anti-Doping Agency sent experts in for six months to analyze the problems and offer solutions. They were more or less told, "Thanks, but no thanks."

"I'm not surprised," said Doug Logan, who ran USA Track and Field in 2008. "It's not a real well-kept secret that the anti-doping regimens in Jamaica haven't been overly rigorous over the course of the years." And yet Logan, who proudly wears the label of concerned cynic when it comes to track, says he would not include Bolt among those he views with suspicion. "It's intuitive, just based on knowing him, watching him," Logan said. "I think he's a generational talent. I have nothing I know that would lead me to believe he has not had a clean career."

Clean or not, his Olympic gold-medal tally now stands at eight. It's little consolation that, in the eyes of some experts, including Howman, Jamaica might finally be getting its anti-doping program in shape.

There's also this: The IOC still holds samples from the London Games, and has a 10-year window to reanalyze them. Carter was on the team that won gold that year, too.

Next up, in addition to possible appeals over the IOC ruling, come the logistical and political challenges involved in Jamaica's Olympic committee rounding up the medals - five of them, including the sprinter who ran in Bolt's place for the preliminaries. If that's successful, they'll redistribute the hardware to the new "winners" from Trinidad and Tobago, who finished nearly a full second behind the Jamaicans and would've still been that far back had Carter been replaced by virtually anyone else on Jamaica's sprint team.

(The US team is not a factor in this conversation. The 2008 prelims marked one of its many mishaps on baton exchanges.) Maybe more interesting will be the new bar-room debate over what this does to Bolt's legacy. Is he now 8 for 8 at the Olympics, 8 for 9, or, simply, 9 for 9 with an asterisk that he really doesn't deserve? Does this diminish anything he's done - most notably, transform a scandal-encrusted sport into an eminently watchable smile-fest whenever he's on the track? "It's really unfortunate that Bolt's name obviously comes up in this," said Ato Boldon, the Olympic sprinter-turned-NBC track analyst, "because the whole world cheered him on to get those nine medals, and obviously he doesn't have the nine anymore." —AP

