

EDITORIAL

Checking of ‘facts’

The Associated Press fact-checked President Trump’s State of the Union speech the day before he gave it. The newsgathering organization, of which the Herald is a member, didn’t have an advance copy of the president’s address.

(Although presumably if it had, the papers wouldn’t have required the liberal application of scotch tape to be legible.)

Rather, the AP was addressing topics that Trump was likely to talk about when he went before Congress.

This is reasonable enough on its face — State of the Union speeches are nothing if not predictable.

And certainly Trump is the ripest of targets for fact checking. In common with most politicians, the president is prone to making statements that put his accomplishments in the best possible light. But Trump’s blustering style, and his preference for simple adjectives such as “best” and “greatest,” lead him to make claims that are easily disproved.

But the AP doesn’t limit itself to that worthwhile endeavor.

Instead, the organization, under the guise of fact checking, seeks to diminish the president’s record by nit-picking claims that are the predictable fodder of political speeches but are too general to be demonstrably false.

For instance, in the pre-speech fact check the AP notes that Trump has “held out his tax cut as a boon to the economy.”

Indeed he has.

The AP’s dispute with this claim begins with a curious passage: “While most economists credit (the tax cuts) with putting extra money in people’s pockets and fueling more consumer spending ...” As if only economists — or at least “most economists” — understand that if the government takes less of workers’ earnings they’ll have more to spend, and likely will do just that.

The AP also contends, again referring to the tax cut law, that “its impact may already be fading.”

The AP offers no facts, or indeed anything, in support of what isn’t even a definitive claim — notice the hedging word “may.”

Even when the AP acknowledges that a boast Trump was apt to make in his speech is factual, the organization, rather than simply acknowledge its accuracy — presumably the purpose of a fact check — or better still leave it out, instead tries to downplay its significance.

The AP writes: “Trump plays a rather ordinary fact for cheers at his rallies — more Americans are working than ever before. That’s mainly because there are ever more Americans. Call it people inflation.”

A clever line for an editorial, perhaps.

But it’s grossly misplaced in something labeled as a fact check — a piece of journalism that ought to be scrupulously objective.

And even as commentary fodder it’s flaccid.

The AP proffers nothing to back its claim that the workforce growth is “mainly” due to a growing population. The implication that the number of people with jobs inevitably follows population growth is not valid — the AP need only consult employment statistics from the 2007 to 2009 recession.

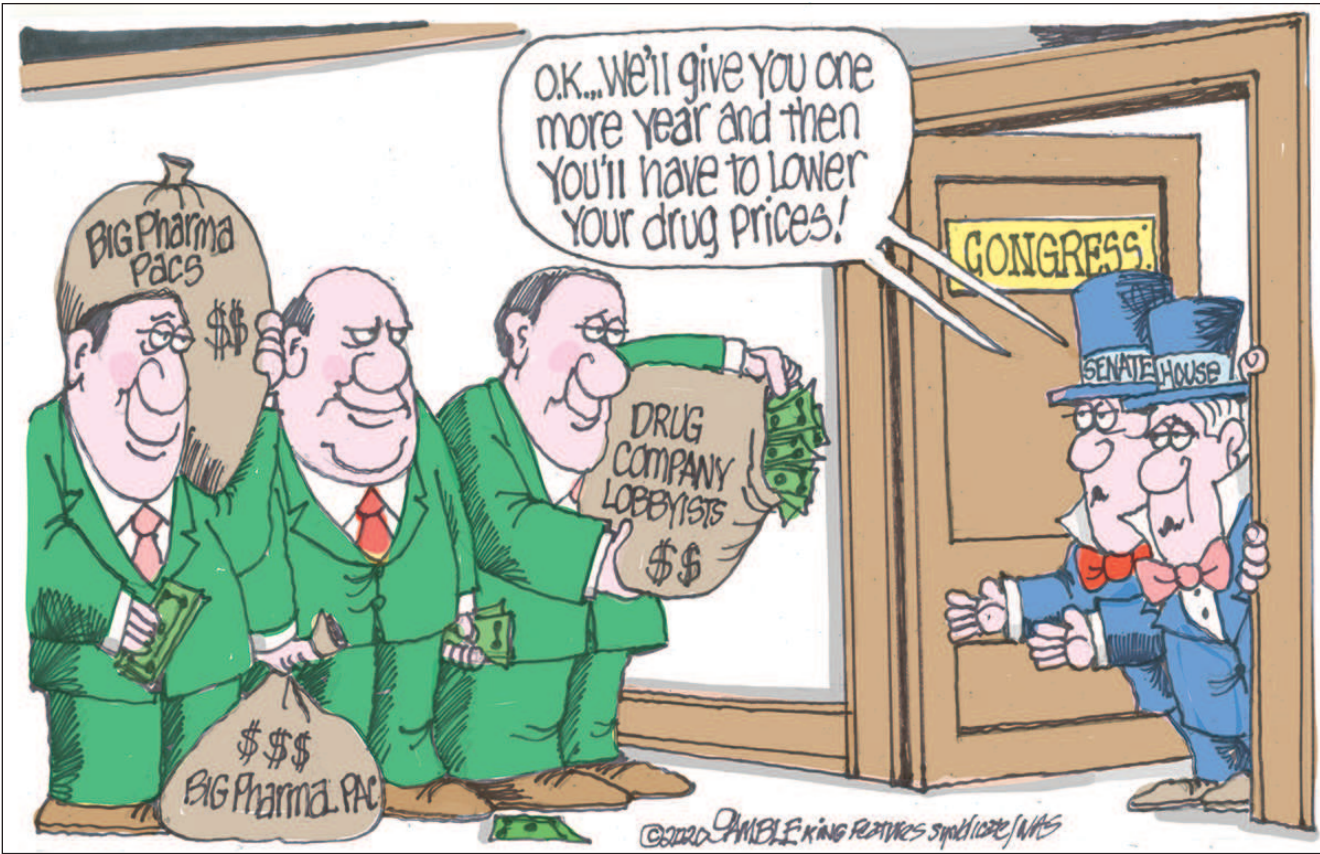
The AP continued its tactics with its follow-up fact check covering Trump’s actual State of the Union speech.

In referencing the president’s boast about the U.S. becoming the world’s largest producer of oil and natural gas, the AP chastises Trump for “taking credit for a U.S. oil and gas production boom that started under Obama.”

Yet the AP acknowledges that the U.S. has been the top producer of crude oil only since 2018. And according to federal records, America’s crude oil production actually dropped in 2016, the last year of the Obama administration, but rose in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

The AP’s fact-checking efforts are valid and, during the Trump administration, more necessary than ever. But there’s no reason for the organization to clog its fact-checking articles with obviously political commentary.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



The art of ripping things up

JAY AMBROSE

course, but people of all races, just as all of us also benefit from a strengthened military and the fact that we are now energy independent. To underline his points, the TV cameras would occasionally visit the balcony and focus on everyday American heroes with dramatic stories.

The Trump narrative adds up to a whole lot, something remarkable in so many directions, but especially the economy. What are the Democrats supposed to do about this? He has already done through capitalism much of what they want to do with more big government and they aren’t about to fix what he has done wrong. The national debt? It could ruin the economy. Trump is doing next to nothing about it but the Democrats’ absurd spending ideas would make it unbelievably worse and their proposed tax hikes would not even pay for their new programs.

Progressives hate the man and it is understandable given his pettiness, his vindictiveness, his vulgarity, his sloppily expressed notions so easy to misread, his lack of coherence, his narcissism, his sense of how they actually look down on millions of Americans and his own suspected bigotry. On top of all that, the Democrats want power and what goes with it and they have given us three years of democratic destructiveness in an effort to get rid of him. The Russian collusion investigation

was a farce and this latest impeachment effort was suspicious from the whistleblower to inadequate and unfair House hearings to the four-week delay in passing “overwhelming” evidence to the Senate, soon told to seek out more.

For all of this, Trump was surprisingly eloquent in his call for unity at the end of his speech, in saying that, if the men and women of Congress could somehow stand above their “differences” and take advantage of their “inheritance,” they could “conquer the unknown.” He talked about setting sights on the “brightest star” and “walking forward together,” simultaneously rekindling “the bonds of love and loyalty and memory that link us together as citizens, as neighbors, as patriots.”

Trump had missed shaking hands with Pelosi when he walked on the stage, either intentionally or unintentionally, and she then introduced him, leaving out traditional words of high respect for the office. As he spoke, she sat behind him making faces like a spoiled fifth-grader, and then, like a teenage vandal, she began ripping his written speech apart as he walked off the stage and millions watched on TV. The act had symbolic meaning, of course. The Democrats are ripping our democracy and possibilities of unity apart in order to have their way even as Trump’s favorability ratings go up.

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OTHER VIEWS

The paradox of Trump’s presidency

Editorial from The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:

President Donald Trump’s State of the Union address was classic Trump. It was full of drama and hype, braggadocio and exaggeration, showmanship and pettiness. It was also substantive and effective.

This is the riddle of Trump: The singular mix of pomposity and real accomplishment. The constant shooting of himself in the foot combined with incisive political instincts.

How does someone who has been the subject of so much disdain, indeed outright hate, boost his poll numbers in the middle of an impeachment trial?

How does someone walk into the House chamber, where a majority voted to impeach him, and leave that room triumphant?

It pains his critics to admit it, but Trump is a force of nature.

And that means he gets things done. Consider his record, which he reviewed Tuesday night: We are seeing the lowest unemployment rate in most of our lifetimes, especially for African Americans. We have a booming stock market, which some experts said would permanently crash if Trump was elected. Many in middle America now have fat 401(k)s for the first time in their lives and can contemplate retirement while they still have some active years left. The president won new trade agreements with Canada, Mexico and China, just as he promised

to do and despite that his critics said he could never get them done once we were in a presidential election cycle. And even his foreign and military policy seems to be working out better than anyone thought it would. Instead of protracted military engagements, he favors quick strikes. He talks tough and carries a big stick. And instead of globalism and alliances, the president talks about “America First” and secure borders, which many Americans find obviously sensible.

There is also much to criticize in the Trump administration. Most of those quick strikes are unconstitutional. And our troops are still on the ground and at risk in places that will never be stable, never mind improved. The coal, steel and auto industries have not “come back” in any significant way. Massive deregulation will hurt many people in many ways.

But the president does have a record of accomplishment.

His problem, from the standpoint of

roughly half the country, is his nature, his persona, his character. And, secondarily, how that nature shapes his understanding of the presidency.

One observer said: If the goal is to unite the country, he has failed.

The president, as we saw in the House chamber this week, is a deeply divisive figure. And the division has worn many Americans out, and down. For them, a booming economy and national security without a new war with Iran is not enough. Character trumps prosperity. National goodwill matters more than a good economy.

But for many other Americans, also roughly half the country, what the president accomplishes matters more than how he behaves.

And the few, but decisive, voters who are in the middle and on the fence may doubt that any Democrat running for president can accomplish more or usher in an era of good feeling.

What the president made clear in the State of the Union is that he is not changing. With him we get the whole package — the building and the bluster. The campaign will be both. He will go to the people as himself, unapologetically. He will run on his record, but he will also run as a salesman and a showman and a street fighter. He sees himself as a doer and the president as an executive, not a head of state or moral leader. In a little less than 10 months the voters will make the call.

Letters to the editor

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