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Trump has 'fun' but fails to feel Americans' pain on prices

3 HR AGO

Analysis by  Stephen Collinson



President Donald Trump gestures as he arrives to deliver remarks on the US economy and ...



President Donald Trump certainly made himself feel better. Whether he did the same for gloomy voters haunted by high prices is more doubtful.

Trump relished returning to a **campaign-style event Tuesday night**, working the crowd like a standup comic, trashing his script and emphasizing wild rhetoric with classic hand gestures, as if playing an imaginary accordion.

Vulnerable Republicans have pleaded with Trump to show he knows how tough it is to make rent, pay for groceries and afford health care. He paid lip service to their hopes in a swing district of northeast Pennsylvania, declaring, “I have no higher priority than making America affordable, again.”

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But don’t try blaming him for high prices, despite his global tariff war that made imported consumer goods more expensive. “Democrats are like ‘prices are too high’, yea they are too high, because (Democrats) caused them to be too high, and now they are coming down,” Trump said. He did edge towards repudiating his claim that the affordability question is a Democratic “hoax” — but then doubled down by insisting he’d already brought down prices across the board.

And anyway, the critical soundbite was lost in the one-and-a-half-hour swamp of Trump’s signature campaign trail ‘weave’ as he boasted about his wins in the 2024 election, slammed wind power, polled his crowd whether “sleepy” or “crooked” was the best nickname for Joe Biden, parodied a Scottish accent and insisted it was only because of him that Americans were able to say “Merry Christmas” again.

Incorrigible as ever, Trump lampooned the entire purpose of this trip. “If I read what’s on the teleprompter, you’d all be falling asleep right now,” he joked. Beaming at raucous supporters, he put in one of his most energetic performances in weeks, after he’s twice seemed to be dozing off in White House events.

But he’ll never change. After a lifetime of hyperbole, he struggles to admit that things are anything less than spectacular on his watch. “We are the hottest country anywhere in the world,” Trump roared, before showing charts purportedly showing rises in real wages and falls in food prices.

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“Democrats talking about affordability is like Bonnie and Clyde preaching about public safety,” Trump said, but offered no new plans to tackle high prices or the expiring Affordable Care Act subsidies that will mean doubled premiums for many Americans next year.

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Trump’s triumphalism was a jarring contrast with how many voters are feeling. Polls show voters have lost faith in Trump’s economic management. Consumer confidence is near record lows, and contrary to his claims most prices are not significantly down since he took office.

‘It doesn’t make sense to me’

One Pennsylvania resident told CNN on Tuesday about how hard it is to stay afloat in the current economy. “I heard a lot of him talking about he’s going to make things affordable again when he was running,” Lynn Weidner, an executive board member at SEIU Healthcare said on CNN’s “The Situation Room.”

“And now affordability is apparently a hoax, which it just doesn’t seem to make sense to me,” said Weidner, who described herself as a lifelong

Republican.

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The gap between Trump’s rhetoric and Americans’ experience will become especially important if a sour public mood about the economy doesn’t improve ahead of the midterm elections next year. Things are especially tight in Monroe County, where Trump appeared Tuesday, which he won by just over 600 votes in the 2024 election. Republicans won two adjacent congressional districts by around 4,000 and 6,000 voters respectively meaning they are top targets for Democrats in their quest to take back the House of Representatives.

This is why something Trump said even before traveling to Pennsylvania Tuesday could prove so damaging. Asked by Dasha Burns of Politico how he’d grade himself on the economy, the president answered: “A-plus-plus-plus-plus-plus-plus.”

This may not age well. If Republicans lose the House, it will join the list of phrases that define failed administrations, alongside President George W. Bush’s “Mission Accomplished” after the Iraq War and the tin-eared “Bidenomics.”



Attendees wear MAGA (Make America Great Again) hats during an "American Comeback Tour" stop hosted by Turning Point USA in Burruss Hall at Virginia Tech university in Blacksburg, Virginia, on September 24, 2025. (Alex Wroblewski/AFP/Getty Images)

Trump has twice expertly weaponized voter anger to win the White House, in 2016 and 2024. But he's less good at feeling their pain. He seemed concerned with almost everything else recently and looks like an out-of-touch billionaire president. He's fixated on his planned new White House **ballroom**, wants to transform **Dulles Airport** and is throwing himself into foreign policy legacy gambles.

When he was campaigning, Trump found a way to identify with the grievances of regular Americans through rallies which helped him transform the Republican Party in a blue collar movement. But since moving back into the White House, he's been more distant and spends most weekends with the wealthy members of his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida and seems most comfortable in the company of mega rich business titans and tech moguls. These folks don't worry about how much groceries cost, or how to pay for housing payment or health care.

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Trump on Tuesday trod a futile path of presidents who get into trouble over the economy and head out into the country to try to show they care.

In rare on message moments, he highlighted parts of his One Big Beautiful Bill domestic policy law, including no taxes on tips. And he predicted higher wage packets under his tax reforms — from which the wealthiest will get most relief.

Reading out long lists of legislation passed and promising things are getting better rarely works. Ask Biden. In June 2022, with inflation at 9.1 % year-on-year, he traveled to Philadelphia. “The bottom line is this: I truly believe we’ve made extraordinary progress by laying a new foundation for our economy, which becomes clear once global inflation begins to recede,” Biden said, adding that he’d “never been more optimistic about America than I am today.” But voters knew life was more expensive — one reason why Trump aced the affordability issue in 2024.

‘Best 10 months in the history of the presidency’

There’s some truth in the current president’s claims that he was left a bad hand on prices by Biden. Grocery and rent costs are up 30% over the last five years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But while such data suggests the cost of living crunch is not just his fault, things are not measurably better. When Trump took the oath of office, inflation was at 3%

— it dipped over the summer, but now it's on an upward tick and was back up at 3% in September.

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Trump has proven adept at leveraging power to order up big foreign investments. He claimed \$100 billion for Pennsylvania alone, as part of what he says has been a multi-trillion dollar windfall for the US so far on his watch. His policies are also convincing some firms to relocate factories inside the country.



A man walks by a food market in the Brooklyn borough of New York City on November 6, 2025
(Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

Hyundai this year announced a **\$20 billion investment** that includes a \$5.8 billion steel plant in Louisiana to supply its factories in Alabama and Georgia. Rolls-Royce is putting up **\$75 million program** to build its mtu Series 4000 engines for luxury yachts, locomotives and generators in South Carolina.

But even if Trump's plan for a new manufacturing golden age works, it will take years and won't ease frustration among voters over high prices in the short-term.

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His other policies meanwhile may stifle inward investment. Tariffs hike the costs of raw material and components US factories need. Trump's constant rising, lowering and pausing of arbitrary duties stifles certainty investors prize. Manufacturing lost about 30,000 jobs between February just after Trump took office, according to monthly Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Worse, the uncertainty could cause long-term malaise. In a recent article in the **Foreign Affairs Magazine**, professors Jonathan Haskel and Matthew Slaughter warned the president could dampen business investment and stagnate growth and mirror the economic impact of Britain's exit from the European Union.

But Trump still insists things have never been better. He celebrated the “best 10 months ever in the history of the presidency” Tuesday and was enjoying himself back on the trail too much to consider the political consequences of his denial.

“I actually like it, I have fun, I haven’t read practically anything off the stupid teleprompter,” he said.



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