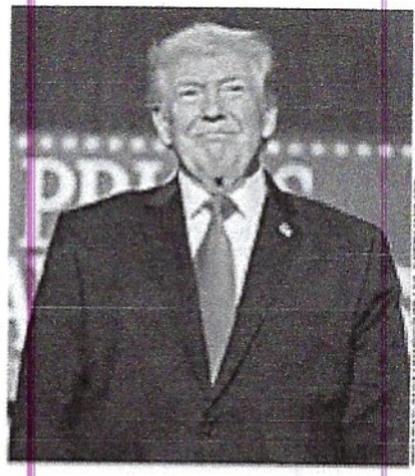


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President Trump's triumphal tone isn't helping matters for everyday Americans.



Trump speaks in Clive, Iowa, Jan. 27. BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/ AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Republicans Have an Economy Problem

By Karl Rove

It's bad news for Republicans that recent coverage of President Trump has been dominated by topics ranging from invading Greenland and Immigration and Customs Enforcement killings in Minneapolis to trashing the Grammys and ordering a giant Jeffrey Epstein document dump. These aren't as important to Americans as the economy.

To correct this problem, the president came to Iowa last month for an economic speech. His team hoped his appearance in a Des Moines suburb would recenter the discussion.

It didn't. Mr. Trump made two mistakes.

The first was straying from the subject for almost half his speech. Victories and stolen elections. Immigration. Introducing politicians on the stage. Attacking his predecessor for multiple sins. Lots of different foreign issues. He went everywhere—and therefore nowhere.

The second problem was Mr. Trump's triumphal tone. He congratulated himself on "the greatest first year of any administration in American history." The "economy is booming," he said. It's been "the best first year of any president ever maybe."

All this left the impression that the nation's economic challenges are solved. He made the same mistake President Biden did with the constant refrain that "Bidenomics is working." Mr. Trump's declaring that "under my leadership, economic growth is exploding to numbers unheard of" isn't just exaggerated. It makes people who are suffering feel unseen and abandoned.

Washington consultant Bruce Mehlman described Mr. Trump's challenge with charts sent to his clients on Sunday. He noted that the University of Michigan's Index of Consumer Sentiment shows the confidence of Americans without a college degree is the lowest since the question was first asked in 1976. Blue-collar jobs declined by more than 145,000 last year. Low-income households are hit harder by inflation because prices for necessities have grown rapidly. A Fox poll shows Republicans leading among white voters without a college degree by only 10 points.

Add to Mr. Mehlman's observations that 58% in a new CNN poll say the president's year was a failure while only 33% believe Mr. Trump cares about people like them. Approval in the RealClearPolitics average of Mr. Trump's handling of the economy is 41% and inflation 37%.

The president should stop bragging. Many Americans, especially swing voters, feel things aren't good. A reliable Politics 101 strategy is to explain, empathize, underpromise and overdeliver. For Republicans, this involves three messaging steps.

First, make clear that the Democrats and Mr. Biden were responsible for the inflation, wild spending and record growth of red tape and regulation. They put America in the ditch.

Second, describe how Mr. Trump and the GOP are strengthening the economy. They kept Democrats from imposing history's largest tax increase by renewing Mr. Trump's 2017 tax cuts, then added new cuts—exclusions on tips, overtime and Social Security. Republicans are controlling spending, reducing the deficit and cooling inflation. Democrats shouldn't be given the power to reverse them.

Third, stress there's more to be done. Mr. Trump and Republicans will repeal the Biden regulations that dumped \$1.8 trillion in new costs on the economy. That will free up money for companies to put into bigger paychecks and better equipment. More trade deals will open markets for American goods and services. Giving patients a fixed sum and letting them shop for the insurance that's best for them will help rein in healthcare costs. Continuing to reduce the deficit and make government leaner will strengthen the economy. None of this will happen if Democrats flip Congress.

House and Senate Republicans shouldn't wait for Mr. Trump's messaging to become focused. Nor should they depend on the economy getting better, even if it will. The president's voice can be powerful. More potent would be hundreds of candidates selling a conservative reform agenda like the one the House Republican Study Committee developed.

For GOP success this fall, Republicans need a better economic message than what Americans heard from the president in Iowa.

Mr. Rove was senior adviser and deputy chief of staff for President George W. Bush and is author of "The Triumph of William McKinley" (Simon & Schuster, 2015).

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