

Trump's More Presidential Approach

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It was far from the best presidential speech ever delivered but Donald Trump's Tuesday night address to a joint session of Congress was a giant leap forward for him.

Even many of his biggest supporters have criticized him for not being "more presidential." They cite his constantly blaming others for problems, presenting fabrications as facts, denigrating government agencies and the professionals who run them, incessant boasting and exaggeration, cranking out mean-spirited or foolish tweets at 3:00 a.m., and wandering off script to take pot shots at someone or something while declaring that the sky is truly falling. It's not inaccurate to say that this White House has often had a distant relationship with the facts if not reality itself.

Getting off to an awful start, Trump has had a lot of catching up to do if he really intends to unite the American people. But, he took some important steps forward in this address. There was less overstating of today's perils and preying on people's fears than we've become accustomed to (although there was a good bit of that) and a number of positive, uplifting moments.

His tone was subdued and he stayed on script, a striking turnaround for him. This will be essential in future public appearances if he is to get the Congress and the public behind him as will a more positive tone.



(Photo source: Twitter)

Still, he referred to “lawless chaos”, the “imploding Obamacare disaster,” “radical Islamic terrorism,” and a nation beset by “gang members, drug dealers, and criminals.” He called for Democrats and Republicans in Congress to work together but didn’t really give Democrats any reason why they should. But, there was no olive branch—not one word of praise for anything Democrats have done.

In general, the talk was strong on rhetoric and short on specifics. The president repeated calls for a lot of expensive programs such as fixing the infrastructure and increasing military financing without outlining how he would pay for them. And, he made promises that will be hard to fulfill, such as a wholesale return of jobs to this country.

Conservative Republicans had to swallow hard when Trump called for paid family maternity leave. That is hardly on the conservative bucket list. But, you could almost hear a massive sigh of relief here and in Europe when this often unpredictable man expressed strong support for NATO, easing fears that had crossed party and international lines.

Perhaps responding to recent criticisms of his failure to do

so, President Trump denounced hate crimes. And, he started off the talk by calling attention to Black History Month and calling for unity across racial and ethnic lines.

Early on, he referred to “new national pride and a surge of optimism.” With his favorability ratings continuing to plunge, massive street demonstrations against his actions and policies, and Republican legislators under siege at town halls, that’s quite a stretch. Hopefully, he meant it as a forecast, not a current analysis of the country’s mood.

In sum, as a presidential address, I’d rate this one a C-plus or C. But, as a Trump speech, it was an A-plus all the way. Let’s hope he will build on this qualified success in the future with a more positive message, more specifics on his programs, and a more convincing reach across the aisle.

***About the Author:** Often referred to as “The Dean of Media Trainers,” Virgil is considered one of the world’s foremost communication experts. In a 30-year career that has covered 26 countries on five continents, he has provided coaching and counsel to heads of some of the world’s largest corporations and government leaders. Virgil is a prolific writer and speaker. His book, *World Class Communication: how great CEOs win with the public, shareholders, employees, and the media*, written with his son Ken, was named one of the 25 best business books of 2012. His column, *In the C-Suite*, appears in every quarterly issue of the *Public Relations Strategist* and is read by leaders of major public relations agencies and global heads of public relations of large companies. He has written or been featured in articles that have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *Reuters*, *Investors Business Daily*, and numerous professional publications. Two of his speeches have been reprinted in the prestigious *Vital Speeches of the Day*. Prior to founding*

Virgil Scudder & Associates in 1990, Virgil headed the media training units of two of the world's largest public relations firms, Hill & Knowlton and Carl Byoir & Associates. Earlier, he was an award-winning news broadcaster at major radio and television networks and stations in New York City. He was a first-night Broadway drama critic for six years during that period, broadcasting reviews on NBC's all-news radio network and all-news WINS radio.