

# The Poverty of the Criticism of Trump's Agenda

By Victor Davis Hanson

Two strange phenomena now characterize the political landscape.

One, opposition to the Trump administration's initiatives has reached a near-unprecedented fever pitch.



The frenzy is manifested in strange ways. At the bottom end, there is an epidemic of street terrorism, including the keying of Teslas, bullying their owners, firebombing dealerships, or vandalizing charging stations.

All that is mostly the logical but dirty reification of those in the media and the Democrats who brand Elon Musk as a foreign-born counterfeit citizen and a disloyal un-American foreigner, thus deserving to be “taken down,” in the words of Rep. Jasmine Crockett. Or is he to be ostracized as an “ass-h\*le” in the invective of Sen. Mark Kelly and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz? The latter cheered a downturn in Tesla stock prices, contrary to the interests of his own state's public portfolio.

Sometimes, the impotent Democrat Congress issues

kickboxing/ninja videos of its feistier female representatives. At other moments, senators race to the bottom, echoing each other's pottymouth expressions of "sh\*t."

Rep. Al Green could neither disrupt nor end Trump's speech to a joint session of Congress by shaking his cane and screaming epithets. Nor, as he damned Trump on the floor of the Senate for 25 hours in a filibuster to nowhere, could Sen. Cory Booker offer a single word that might offer his supposedly better way to address crushing debt and deficits.

Two, there is a second common denominator to all this frenzy and fury: there is so far no alternate agenda on trade deficits, budget deficits, and debt.

That is, no one on the left—or, for that matter, the libertarian right or the now inert Republican establishment—can outline an alternate pathway to Trump's remedies for America's dire problems. Just as the left used to worship Tesla's breakthrough EV cars and now tries to destroy them, so too it once lectured the country on the merits of tariff-enforced symmetrical trade—until Donald Trump made that his signature issue.

So in lieu of serious counter-proposals, we get from the left vulgarity, the smash-mouth of Rep. Crockett, and street terror against fellow Americans. All this inanity is the natural bookend to the prior four years of lawfare, the efforts to remove Trump from state ballots, the Mar-a-Lago raid, and two assassination attempts.

Most of the organs of Wall Street, the free-market think tanks, and the few liberation university economics departments likewise issue virulent denunciations of tariffs, of even massive DOGE cuts in the federal workforce and budget, and, strangely, of the deportation of Tren de Aragua, a terrorist-designated violent foreign gang whose members entered and now reside illegally in the United States.

So why does the left not simply claim that its prior support of tariffs was wrongheaded? (See the now-ancient denunciations by Nancy Pelosi and Bernie Sanders of Bush-era “free trade,” deindustrialization, globalization, and lost jobs.) Now, the left supports... what exactly? Mini-tariffs? No tariffs? Reciprocal tariffs?

Absent is concern about the ticking time bomb of \$3 billion in interest payments on the debt per day, in addition to the monstrous \$37 trillion in debt itself. Did Cory Booker spend a single minute of his 25-hour address to outline ways to reduce our 125% debt to annual GDP?

Per year, the interest cost on the debt is larger than the defense budget; does AOC ever note that? The current Biden vestigial budget is nominally \$1.7 trillion in the red. Is there a Democrat agenda to head us toward balanced budgets?

So, what does the left propose as its financial remedies?

Is it to raise taxes on those who should “pay their fair share?” That is, do they want the top rates to rise from 37% to 40%, 45%, 50%, so that their own constituent “affluent” in blue states like high-tax California, Illinois, and New York should properly and deservedly pay the IRS 50% to 60% of their earnings in income tax alone?

Does the tax-and-spend left prefer instead a value-added tax or some sort of federal sales tax? Or do they think current levels of spending are just fine?

Is there really no waste, fraud, and abuse in the federal budget, but instead too few federal workers?

Or are they modern monetary theorists, who believe money is but a construct, one that the government can do with in whatever manner it wishes? Thus, debt is simply remedied by printing more of the construct, or finding ways to expropriate private wealth, or inflating our way out of debt?

But again, please tell us how the left has a superior agenda to Trump's that will get us more quickly and efficiently to a balanced budget, if not a reduced national debt.

Or is debt itself not supposed to be a problem? Does the left believe interest rates are the real crux? As in the recent past, if interest rates are no more than the rate of inflation, then essentially, the government can borrow all it wants at zero interest—and literally did so at times over the last half century. Is that their remedy?

Can the Republican establishment help out and pause a moment from their napalming of the Trump initiatives? Can it issue briefs that outline how to take us to either a balanced budget and reduced debt or convince us that debt in all manifestations is no big deal?

Then we turn to trade deficit. Again, there is utter silence about solutions from most critics. No counter-proposals, no alternate agenda, just fury and hysteria—or denials that deficits and debt are a problem at all.

So, does the left or right believe that 50 years of continuous trade deficits do not matter? Who cares if we are running a near \$1 trillion annual outflow in the gap between what we export and import?

Please make the argument that the real losers are the recent economies of India, China, or Mexico, which supposedly foolishly tax imports and yet demand tariff-free exports, all to run up surpluses. Are they suicidal and we, the masters of trade deficits, the real geniuses?

Does it matter that almost all of the proposed Trump tariffs are in some way responsive? In that sense, they are calibrated on autopilot, leaving the proverbial ball in the court of those with high tariffs and huge surpluses to set new shared reciprocal rates.

So, if it was wrong for Trump to level reciprocal tariffs, was it right for others to initiate asymmetrical tariffs on us?

Is it more logical to damn those who object to \$1 trillion in annual trade deficits rather than those whose tariffs resulted in their warped surpluses?

Or is it wiser to blame the victim? The U.S. deserves its trade deficit because it is too affluent, too naïve to object, or too profligate to be saved?

Or is the argument one of the Sermon on the Mount: we must turn the other cheek as we have for a half century? Or, as an affluent sort of good Samaritan, can we afford to stay forbearing and take the hit for the global team?

The final problem with the notion of Trump as the 80-day destroyer of America is not just the poverty of economic counterproposals from the left or right. It is also the complete news blackout of what Trump has already accomplished in 10 weeks.

Does anyone notice that, almost overnight, America's southern border is now magically secure, with virtually no illegal immigration—and without the much-ballyhooed need for “comprehensive immigration reform?”

How did we go from 10,000 illegal aliens a day to near zero? What was so bad about identifying hundreds of billions of budgetary dollars in fraud and waste in a mere two months?

Why are we now talking about ways to end the Ukraine war rather than boasting “as long as it takes” to feed the new Stalingrad?

Why are the Houthis now being abandoned by the Iranians, who, in a matter of weeks, no longer seem to be the feared bully of the Middle East? Were not their terrorist tentacles just months ago considered unstoppable and sacrosanct?

Was it wrong finally and dramatically to reflect the wishes of 80 percent of the American people, who do not want biological males to overturn a half-century's worth of hard work to obtain parity for women's sports?

We, as a nation, need to calm down.

Either acknowledge, however reluctantly, the good that has already been done in the first ten weeks. Or, if one feels the border should be open, or the war should be accelerated in Ukraine, or the campuses were just fine until 2025, or women just need to get over losing to transgendered men, then just say so.

Or if one believes huge trade and budget deficits and unsustainable national debt are no big deal, then argue just that.

Or, if the rub is that Trump is addressing these existential and long-neglected crises in the wrong way, then please present alternate plans for quicker and better resolutions or better messaging.

Should he limit tariffs only to those nations with deficits and asymmetrical tariffs? Should he speak more quietly and mention more frequently that he was moved to act only by a half-century of neglect? Could he emphasize more that the \$3-4 trillion in promised foreign investment will ignite job growth within a year?

But if there is no alternate agenda, no constructive criticism, then why would anyone listen to those who either helped to get us into this mess or have no clue about its solutions?

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