

■ Bernie Sanders's Response to President Trump's Address to Congress

Date: March 4, 2025

Author: Bernie Sanders

Genre: speech

Summary Overview

In a live-streamed message, Bernie Sanders, progressive senator from Vermont, criticized President Donald Trump's address, earlier the same evening, to a joint session of the U.S. Congress. Sanders stated that Trump's speech created a "parallel universe" for his supporters, disconnected from reality and the concerns of the American people. Sanders accused Trump of using the "big lie" tactic (i.e., denying his loss in the 2020 presidential election) to spread false information. The senator addressed what he said were real issues facing Americans, such as living paycheck to paycheck, the broken healthcare system, homelessness, and income inequality, which he claims Trump had ignored. Sanders outlined a series of progressive policy proposals, including raising the minimum wage, expanding Social Security, guaranteeing healthcare for all, reducing prescription drug prices, building affordable housing, making higher education tuition-free, and combating climate change. He urged people to fight back against oppression and injustice, advocating for a political system that represents the many, not the few.

Defining Moment

Having returned to the presidency in January 2025, after a bitterly fought campaign, Donald Trump delivered an address to a joint session of the U.S. Congress on March 4, 2025. The speech, which began after 9:00 p.m. (EST) and lasted over ninety minutes, was Trump's first public address to a joint session during his second term. The event took place in the U.S. House of Representatives, with Vice President JD Vance and Speaker of the House Mike Johnson present.

Key topics discussed during Trump's speech included the high price of eggs, energy prices, support for police and firefighters, a potential peace agreement for the Russo-Ukrainian War, and the implementation of tariffs. There was also discussion of Trump's 2024 election victory and "mandate" for implementing hard-right policies, particularly on immigration.

The speech was not without its disruptions and protests. Democratic Representative Al Green was removed and later censured for repeatedly shouting that Trump had not received a mandate—the election

was not exactly a landslide. Some Democratic women wore symbolic colors to highlight women's rights, and several Democrats staged silent protests, walked out, or held up signs with various messages.

Senator Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) delivered the official Democratic response to Trump's address. She criticized Trump's economic policies, particularly his use of tariffs, and warned against the potential consequences, such as rising costs and the risk of a recession. Slotkin, a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) analyst and a new senator, emphasized the need for responsible change and criticized what she perceived as a divisive approach by the president.

Senator Bernie Sanders, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, delivered his own response on social media. He went further than Slotkin did in criticizing Trump and laying out ideas for a progressive solution to the problems facing many Americans.

Author Biography

Bernie Sanders is an American politician and U.S. senator known for his progressive policies and advo-



Bernie Sanders in 2025. Photo by Gage Skidmore, via Wikimedia Commons.

cacy for economic and social justice. He was born in 1941 in Brooklyn, New York. Sanders attended Brooklyn College before transferring to the University of Chicago, where he earned a bachelor's degree.

He began his political career as the mayor of Burlington, Vermont, serving from 1981 to 1989. Sanders was elected to the House of Representatives in 1990, representing Vermont's at-large congressional district, and served there until 2007. In 2007, he was elected to the U.S. Senate, where he has represented Vermont since.

Throughout his career, Sanders has been a prominent advocate for issues such as healthcare reform, income equality, climate change, and workers' rights.

He is known for his democratic socialist views and ran for president of the United States in 2016 and 2020, gaining a significant following for his policy proposals and rhetoric. Indeed, he was the last candidate standing on the Democratic side in both election cycles before the nomination went to the favored nominees, Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Joe Biden in 2020.

After Trump's reelection in 2025, after a close race, Sanders launched a progressive speaking tour—"Fighting Oligarchy"—with Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY). The two arguably are the most progressive members of Congress, and their tour proved highly successful, drawing large crowds of 20,000 to 30,000 people, even, in some cases, in states won by Trump.



Historical Document

Senator Bernie Sanders' Response to President Trump's Congressional Address

March 4, 2025

[Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) today delivered remarks following President Trump's address to a joint session of Congress. Over 91,000 viewers watched in real time on his social media platforms.]

Hello everybody. Thanks for joining.

As most Americans know, we are living in a pivotal moment in American history—facing unprecedented challenges. How we respond to this moment will impact not only OUR lives, but the lives of our kids and grandchildren and, in terms of climate change, the very health and well-being of our planet.

As you heard tonight, President Trump has been very effective in creating what I would call a “parallel universe” for his supporters—a set of ideas that either have NO basis in reality or, in the great scheme of things, are nowhere near the most important concerns of the American people.

And one way that he does that is through the concept of the BIG LIE. Say something that is grossly false, say it over and over again, and have right-wing social media blast it out endless times, until people actually believe it.

And then, rather than address the real issues facing the American people, we find ourselves wasting endless amounts of time discussing Trump's absurdities.

Just a few examples:

Trump has claimed that the 2020 election was stolen from him and that he won by a landslide. A lie.

Trump has claimed that the January 6th insurrection was a day of love. A lie.

Trump has claimed that millions of undocumented people vote in American elections. A lie.

Trump has claimed that climate change is a hoax originating in China. A lie.

Trump has claimed that Ukraine started the horrific war with Russia. A lie.

And tonight, Trump claimed that millions of dead people between the ages of 100 and 360 were collecting Social Security checks. That is an outrageous lie intended to lay the groundwork for cuts to Social Security and dismantling the most successful and popular government program in history.

Let's be clear: Well over 99% of Social Security checks are going out to people who earned those checks—70 million people. Nobody who is 150 years old or 200 years old or 300 years old is receiving Social Security checks.

And on and on it goes.

Now, the purpose of all of this lying is not just to push his hateful right-wing ideology. It is not just to try to divide us up. It's more than that.

It's a masterful effort to deflect attention away from the most important issues facing the people of our country, issues that Trump and his billionaire friends do not want to address because it's not in their financial interests to do so.

Trump gave his "State of the Union" speech tonight. But that speech had very little to say ABOUT the state of the union—about what is REALLY going on in our country—especially for working families.

Trump spoke for 90 minutes and he almost completely ignored the issues that are keeping working people up at night—as they worry about how their families are going to survive in these tough times.

And I'll tell you exactly WHY Trump had very little to say about the REAL crises facing the working class of this country.

Think back 6 weeks ago when Trump was inaugurated for his second term as President—just 6 weeks ago. Standing right behind him were the three wealthiest men in the country—Mr. Musk, Mr. Bezos and Mr. Zuckerberg. And standing behind THEM were 13 other billionaires who Trump had nominated to head major government agencies. Many of these same billionaires—including Musk—were there tonight.

In other words, it is there for all to see. They're not hiding it. The Trump administration IS a government of the billionaire class, by the billionaire class and for the billionaire class.

Notwithstanding some of their rhetoric, this is a government that could care less about the working families of this country.

My friends. We are no longer MOVING TOWARD oligarchy. We are LIVING IN an oligarchy.

Now, let's take a moment and try to escape from Trump's parallel universe. Let's do something really radical.

Let's actually take a hard look at the problems that Americans are facing.

Today, 60% of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck. Unlike Trump, I grew up in a family that lived paycheck to paycheck. And I know something about that reality.

It means that every day millions of Americans worry about how they're going to pay their rent. Pay for childcare. Pay for a doctor's visit when they get sick.

They worry about what happens when their car breaks down and they can't afford the thousand bucks it costs to get it fixed, and what happens when they can't get to work because they don't have a car. They worry about how they can afford to buy healthy food for their children when the price of food is off the charts.

Funny. I did not hear one word from Trump tonight about the economic reality facing 60% of our people, or the enormous stress that they are living under.

But that's not all.

Today in America, everyone knows that our healthcare system is broken, it is dysfunctional and it is outrageously expensive. We remain the only wealthy nation on earth not to guarantee healthcare for all.

Mr. President: You really want to Make America Great Again? Then make sure that every American, regardless of income, can go to a doctor or a hospital and not worry about how they're going to pay the bills.

President Trump: Health care is a human right. I didn't hear one word from you about that.

Nor did I hear you say why we pay, by far, the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs—sometimes 10 times more than the people in other countries—and why one out of four Americans are unable to afford the prescriptions that their doctors prescribe.

Mr. President: We have nearly 800,000 Americans who are homeless. Over 20 million of our people spend more than 50% of their limited income on housing. We have a major housing crisis in America—everyone knows it. And in your speech tonight, you didn't even mention it.

Today in America, we have more income and wealth inequality than we have ever had. The three richest people in America, the folks Trump invited to stand behind him at his inauguration, now own more wealth than the bottom half of our society—170 million Americans. Did you hear one word from the President on that enormously important issue which gets to the very fabric of our society?

And here's something else the President forgot to discuss. Not only is our life expectancy 4 years lower than other wealthy countries, the bottom 50% in this country live, on average, 7 years shorter lives than the top 1%. In other words, being poor or working class in this country is a death sentence. Did you hear any discussion tonight as to why so many of our people are living shorter lives than they should?

During his speech tonight, Trump did not have one word to say about how we are going to address the planetary crisis of climate change. The last 10 years have been the warmest ever recorded, and extreme weather disturbances and natural disasters have been taking place all over the world—from California to India, across Europe to North Carolina. And yet, not surprisingly, Trump had nothing to say about climate change.

And let's be clear. Not only did Trump fail to talk about some of the most important issues facing the working class of America, but "the SOLUTIONS" he proposed would only make a bad situation even worse.

Yes, I did hear Trump talk tonight about some tax breaks for working families in terms of not taxing tips, not taxing Social Security and not taxing overtime. Fine. But that's chump change compared to the benefits he's going to give the 1%, and doesn't tell the whole story about his tax policies.

According to a recent study by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, if all of Trump's so-called "America First" policies are enacted, including his tariffs, the bottom 95% of Americans will see their taxes go up, while the richest 5% in our country will see their taxes go down. WAY DOWN.

Tonight, Trump urged Congress to pass his "big, beautiful" budget.

Do you know what's really in it?

This budget would cut Medicaid by \$880 billion. According to one estimate, it means that up to 36 million Americans, including millions of children, would be thrown off the health insurance they have.

It means that nursing homes that receive two-thirds of their funding from Medicaid would either have to shut down, lay off workers or significantly scale back the services they provide seniors.

It would be a devastating blow for the 32 million Americans who get their health care at community health centers.

And, it's not just Medicaid. Trump's budget would cut nutrition assistance by at least \$230 billion. Can you imagine? The billionaire class, people who can support their families for the next ten generations, people who live in incredible opulence, people who own their own jet planes, private islands and space ships, trying to get tax breaks by taking food out of the mouths of low-income kids. That truly is disgusting.

What we are seeing is the Robin Hood principle in reverse—taking from the poor and giving to the rich.

And here is something else Trump has been doing.

For the past several weeks, he and Elon Musk have been throwing hundreds of thousands of federal employees off their jobs. Now, I know some of you are saying, "That's too bad, but that's the federal government, not me."

But I want you to think about this: If they can arbitrarily throw federal workers out on the street today, what do you think that Musk and his fellow billionaires will be doing tomorrow when Artificial Intelligence and robotics explode in this country?

Do you think they'll give a damn about you and your families? No. You'll be out on the street as well.

But it is not only absurd domestic policies that we've got to fight.

For the first time in our 250-year history we have a president who is turning his back on democracy and allying us with authoritarianism. No. We must not abandon the people of Ukraine who were invaded by the Russian dictator, Vladimir Putin. We must always stand for democracy, not dictatorship.

Let me be very clear. Regardless of where Trump is taking this country, here's where I think Americans want to go:

They want us to end a corrupt campaign finance system, which allows a handful of billionaires to buy elections. It is beyond crazy that someone like Elon Musk can contribute over \$270 million to help get Trump elected and then gets to run the government.

It is absurd that any Member of Congress who stands up to Netanyahu's brutal war in Gaza can expect to be opposed by millions of dollars in campaign contributions from AIPAC.

They want us to end the disastrous Citizens United Supreme Court decision and move to the public funding of elections. Democracy is supposed to be about one person, one vote—not billionaires buying the political candidates of their choice.

No. We should not be giving tax breaks to billionaires. We must demand that they pay their fair share of taxes.

We must raise the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour to a living wage of at least \$17 an hour.

We must make it easier for workers to join trade unions, grow the union movement and prevent corporations from violating labor laws with impunity by passing the PRO Act—legislation I will be introducing tomorrow.

No, we're not going to cut Social Security. Quite the contrary, we must expand Social Security benefits and extend its solvency for the next 75 years by scrapping the cap that allows a billionaire to pay the same amount into Social Security as a truck driver.

Instead of making massive cuts to Medicaid, we must join every other major country on earth in guaranteeing healthcare to all of our people through a Medicare for All, single-payer program.

We must also take on the greed of the pharmaceutical industry and reduce prescription drug prices by 50%.

At a time of a terrible housing crisis in every area of our country, we must build at least 4 million units of low-income and affordable housing, stop corporate landlords from jacking up rent prices and establish a cap on rent.

In a competitive global economy, we need the best educated workforce in the world. All of our young people must have the ability to get a higher education by making public colleges, trade schools and universities tuition-free and canceling student debt.

Yes. We can create millions of good-paying jobs by combating climate change and moving our energy system away from fossil fuels and into sustainable energy.

I heard a lot of talk about freedom tonight. Well, in a free society, we must absolutely guarantee that it is the women of America who control their own bodies, not the local, state or federal governments.

Now, I know there are a lot of people out there who are feeling angry and frustrated at what's going on here in Washington, D.C. And some of you may feel a bit hopeless.

So let me say this.

At this particular moment in history, despair is not an option. Giving up is not acceptable. And none of us have the privilege of hiding under the covers. The stakes are just too high.

Let us never forget. Real change only occurs when ordinary people stand up against oppression and injustice—and fight back.

That is the history of the founding of our nation when brave men and women took on the mighty British empire. It is the history of the abolitionist movement, the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the environmental movement and the gay rights movement.

Yes, the oligarchs ARE enormously powerful. They have endless amounts of money. They control our economy. They own much of the media. They have enormous influence over our political system.

But, from the bottom of my heart, I am convinced that they can be beaten.

If we stand together and not let them divide us up by the color of our skin or where we were born or our religion or sexual orientation; if we bring our people together around an agenda that works for the many and not the few—there is nothing in the world that can stop us.

We can win. We will win. Let's go forward together.

[Source: www.sanders.senate.gov.]



Document Analysis

Senator Sanders criticizes President Trump's address, arguing that Trump creates a "parallel universe" of false ideas for his supporters, deflecting attention from important issues. Sanders accuses Trump of repeatedly lying and highlights specific claims made by Trump that he asserts are false, such as the 2020 election being stolen from Trump, the January 6 insurrection being a day of love, and Ukraine starting the war with Russia. These are all indeed demonstrable falsehoods.

Sanders contends that Trump's policies favor the billionaire class and neglect the working families of America. He points out the presence of wealthy individuals like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos at Trump's inauguration and criticizes Trump's proposed budget cuts to Medicaid and nutrition assistance programs. Sanders also accuses Trump of turning his back on democracy and aligning with authoritarianism.

Sanders advocates for policies that address the needs of working-class Americans, such as raising the minimum wage, expanding Social Security benefits, guaranteeing healthcare for all through a Medicare for All program, reducing prescription drug prices, building affordable housing, and making higher education tuition-free. He also calls for ending the corrupt campaign finance system and ensuring women's control over their own bodies. Sanders concludes by urging Americans to stand together against oppression and injustice, drawing inspiration from historical movements for change.

Essential Themes

The speech is a classical critique and articulation of progressive policy aims on Sanders's part. It addresses a variety of interconnected issues, with proposals designed to create a more just and equitable society. It goes beyond surface-level solutions, delving into systemic problems that disproportionately affect working-class families and marginalized communities. For example, advocating for a \$17-an-hour minimum wage acknowledges the increasing cost of living and the need for workers to earn a wage that allows them to meet basic needs and support their families. The call for expanding Social Security challenges the narrative of scarcity and prioritizes the financial security of retirees and those with disabilities.

Sanders's emphasis on universal healthcare through Medicare for All stems from the belief that healthcare is a human right, not a privilege, and that access to quality medical care should not be dependent on income or employment status. His proposals for affordable housing directly address the housing crisis by seeking to regulate rent increases and invest in the construction of low-income housing units. Similarly, his focus on tuition-free college and student debt cancellation aims to remove financial barriers to higher education, allowing individuals to pursue their educational and career goals without being burdened by debt.

Recognizing the urgent threat of climate change, he calls for a transition to sustainable energy sources, with the potential to create millions of good-paying jobs in the process. The reaffirmation of reproductive rights underscores the importance of individual autonomy and the right to make decisions about one's own body. The senator's call for campaign finance reform is rooted in the belief that money distorts the political process and that ordinary citizens should have a greater voice in their government.

Ultimately, this speech by Sanders reflects a vision of a more just and equitable society, one where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, and where the government works on behalf of the many, not just the few. It challenges the status quo and offers concrete (progressive) solutions to address the pressing issues facing the nation. These themes are ones that have long been dear to Sanders over the course of his thirty-five-year career in national politics.

—Michael Shally-Jensen, PhD

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