

Love and loathing for Trump in longest ever Congress speech

AFP- Donald Trump leaned on his reality TV instincts as he goaded opponents, wooed adoring fans, and engineered heart-tugging moments Tuesday in the longest-ever presidential speech to Congress.

There was love and loathing as the Republican held the floor – and TV airwaves – for a record one hour and 40 minutes.

Trump entered the House chamber to cheers from Republicans and took a languid stroll down the center aisle to the podium, pressing the flesh along the way.

As he passed Democrat Melanie Stansbury, the New Mexico congresswoman held up a sheet of paper reading “This is not normal.”

A Republican politician snatched the sign out of her hands – a harbinger of the tensions to come.

Trump’s speech was meant to be to the whole of Congress and the nation, but he sounded like he was still campaigning for the presidency, rarely bothering to reach out to opponents at all – unless to throw jibes.

On the Republican side of the chamber, the president’s jabs were met with repeated standing ovations and chants of “USA! USA!”

The ultra-Trumpist congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene sported a red “Trump was right about everything” cap – in violation of a ban on headwear introduced almost two centuries ago.

On the other side, the Democratic members remained seated and stony-faced.

Within minutes, Democratic congressman Al Green stood up and yelled at the president: "You don't have a mandate."

His protest was drowned out by chanting from outraged Republicans and he was eventually turfed out.

Ever the showman, Trump was in his element as both compere and star turn, directing several made-for-TV moments from the podium.

One of his invited guests, a 13-year-old cancer patient, was anointed an agent in his Secret Service protection detail.

At another moment, he called out to a student in the audience and announced – to his clear surprise and delight – that he had been accepted to study in the prestigious West Point military academy.

– Ukraine support from Democrats –

After Friday's angry scenes in the White House between Trump and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, support for the US ally was obvious on the Democratic side.

Lawmakers wore scarves, striped ties or lapel ribbons in the yellow and blue colors of the Ukrainian flag, a sign of solidarity for a war-torn ally they consider the Trump administration to have betrayed.

Others wore pink outfits to protest against what they see as the Trump administration's anti-women policies.

Some of the House Democrats left the chamber before Trump had even got into his stride and Texas Democrat Jasmine Crockett removed her jacket to reveal a t-shirt with the word "Resist" emblazoned on the back.

– Musk the spectator –

If Trump was expecting a sold-out speech, he will have been disappointed.

A number of Democrats had previously announced that they would be giving the event a wide berth and a steady trickle left the room as 30 minutes became an hour, and then an hour and a half.

Elon Musk, the world's richest person and Trump's point man on drastically downsizing the federal government, watched from the galleries, a mere spectator to the drama for once.

Yet, even from the sidelines, he still managed to command the attention of the TV cameras as Trump invited applause for a man whose millions helped get the Republican elected.

A few hours before Trump's arrival, a dozen protesters outside the US Capitol waved signs reading "Stand up to tyranny" and "Musk must go."

Trump seemed to provide a direct retort during his speech, as he warned: "We're just getting started."

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