Carefully parsing language helps reveal much about Wednesday’s televised statement by the outgoing special counsel, Robert Mueller. To those who criticize Mueller for not going far enough to hold President Donald Trump accountable, I recommend a close rhetorical analysis of what Mueller said; his words speak for themselves and paint a clear picture.

First, his message communicated that he was behaving professionally and in strict accordance with the limited charge he was given by the attorney general. Second, Mueller’s words were deliberately chosen, making transparent the real reason he was asked to conduct an investigation (which, contrary to some, was not the Steele dossier), his rebuke of what President Trump has been saying about the conclusions of the Mueller Report (namely, that the Russians did not interfere in the 2016 election to help one candidate, that there was no collusion and no obstruction, and that it exonerated the president), Mueller’s disagreement — albeit phrased respectfully — with Attorney General William Barr, and, most important, the fact that the Constitution, unlike the special counsel’s restricted legal investigation, provides a specific mechanism for addressing Trump’s behavior and holding him accountable for possible wrongdoing.
Therefore, before listening to the spin of politicians who already have made up their mind about the president, I encourage Americans to read the written transcript of Mueller’s statement. A careful rhetorical analysis shows that the Mueller Report was written in a manner deliberately designed to place the ball in Congress’s court.

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