January 10, 2019

“Focus Not on Trump’s Lies, But His Rhetorical Strategy”

The media and political pundits missed the point when they focused exclusively on the likelihood that President Trump would and then did lie in his Tuesday address to the nation on the alleged border crisis. This is not simply a public policy or even ethical issue—it also is a rhetorical issue.

What most of the media and pundits ignored was that, despite all of his faults and presidential ineptitude, Trump understands marketing and the ability to repackag
his policies and rhetorically manufacture a crisis in order to win, a skill that has served him well throughout his life. He believes—and it is possible he may be right—that the prime-time speech and subsequent visit to the Southern border could result in a slight shift in public opinion and Congressional sentiment on the wall and government shutdown, and a boost to the Trump 2020 campaign.

If that happens, and it may not, it won’t matter how much he lied or the apparent lack of a valid grounding for his proposed border policy; what will matter is how persuasive Trump’s public relations campaign to reframe the issue and rhetorically create a crisis will be in turning Americans against the Democrats’ refusal to fund the wall as a way to open the government.

This is a pivotal moment for our country. How sad it is that all of this boils down to winning and losing, rather than what is in the nation’s best interest.

Richard Cherwitz
Austin, Texas