

FEATURE

"Liberation Day" surprise: Trump gets outmatched

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Donald Trump ALLISON BAILEY/Middle East Images/AFP via Getty Images

[Donald Trump](#) strode into the Rose Garden Wednesday with the elegance and subtlety of a sledgehammer. He was there to enact a variety of “[reciprocal tariffs](#)” on a host of nations, friends and foes, on what he called “[Liberation Day](#).”

Within a minute of smiling and walking to the podium, he talked about “[punishing](#)” [our allies and told us “in many cases the friend is worse than the foe” in trade](#). He pointed at the Oval Office about 60 feet away from where he stood, and as the brisk April breeze danced

through his thinning hair, he said he blamed former presidents and past leaders for destroying the manufacturing base of the U.S. “To an extent no one can even believe.”

Then he tried to gild the lily by saying the Great Depression would have never happened if there had been tariffs at the time. The problem is, there were. And, worse, President Herbert Hoover signed the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act into law in 1930. The law exacerbated economic strife in America, which led to less international trade, cooperation and trust among nations. The

economy, as we all should know, if we took any American history in 12 years of mandatory education, did not improve because of the tariffs.

Historians and economists argue that those conditions led to rising tension and violence around the globe and were an indirect cause of World War II. Ronald Reagan, another infamous Republican, actually blamed Smoot-Hawley for causing the Great Depression.

Trump doesn't care. "This is going to lead to growth like you've never seen before," he said. "This country was heading for a collapse." Trump also chided our international allies, calling some of them "foreign cheaters" and "scavengers" who ripped off and "brutalized" Americans for 50 years. The media, of course, was still "fake news" and the Democrats were still crazy leftists while the judiciary was incompetent and partisan.

The image that Trump painted of America and our future was far different from the one we saw in the U.S. Senate the day before. On Tuesday, for the first time during his new administration, Donald Trump failed to suck all of the media oxygen out of the room.

On day 72 of the new Donald Trump regime, New Jersey Senator Cory Booker took it. But to Donald's credit, Booker had to stand up for 25 hours straight, without a bathroom break, without eating, without resting, and had to hold the floor of the U.S. Senate to accomplish the task.

That tells you just how ingrained Trump is in the American psyche and how hard it is to take the microphone from his gnarled little hands.

Booker was a tour de force, with a seemingly unending well of energy. Toward the end, he got a little punch drunk, calling the first 72 days of the Trump administration "72 years," but you don't have to be standing on your feet speaking for 25 hours to feel that way. Republicans and Democrats praised him for his stamina and clarity. Booker, after 25 hours, was still more cogent than Trump is after 25 minutes.

Booker apparently fasted and cut his water intake so he could reduce the need to visit a bathroom. He had a chair removed so he wouldn't be tempted to sit. Part of his motivation was to outlast Strom Thurmond, who spoke for 24 hours and 18 minutes in a failed attempt to block the Civil Rights Act of 1957. More recently, Republican Senator Ted Cruz spoke for 21 hours and 19 minutes in 2013 to protest the Affordable Care Act, which had been law for three years when he got an itch.

And while members of the GOP applauded Booker's tenacity, they also secretly snickered that "he'll be as successful as Thurmond was holding back civil rights."

At the heart of Booker's marathon speech was the idea that the U.S. is at a "moral moment" and it isn't about left or right, but "right or wrong." When Trump spoke on Wednesday, he played up the old tropes of rugged individualism for America and said our allies "profited at our expense." The day before, Booker said, "Rugged individualism didn't beat the Nazis or get us to the Moon," and he praised America's long term allies including Canada, Mexico and our friends in Europe as being integral to peace.

Wednesday, Trump decried our allies and said the U.S. has had to "subsidize countries" like Canada and Mexico to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars. Fans in the Rose Garden audience dutifully cheered — even as Trump blatantly lied. Some of them wore the "MAGA" red hat. Some wore hard hats. All of them smiled as Trump announced that, through his actions, foreign companies will come racing back to the country "almost overnight" to open up production.

These are the same supporters who believe "*Signalgate*" means nothing. They don't care if "Pedro caught a bad flight. That was collateral damage," they say when discussing a father who had no criminal past being transported to a foreign prison by Trump's ICE teams. As for Trump taking over the press corps and kicking out reporters he doesn't like, one Trump

supporter told me, “After the propaganda put forth by legacy media and their silence on the border and Biden’s cognitive decline and silence about what a dimwit Kamala is, they deserve to be booted and reassigned. No credibility.”

To them, Trump’s revenge tour (i.e. his new administration) is “Liberation Day,” above and beyond what Trump did in the Rose Garden Wednesday. “He liberated us the moment he walked into the White House,” his followers continue to preach. So, if Trump says domestic production will increase exponentially “overnight,” then they believe it.

That is diametrically opposed to what Booker said in his opening remarks before he stood up to oppose Trump in the Senate. “In just 71 days, the president has inflicted harm after harm on Americans' safety, financial stability, the foundations of our democracy, and any sense of common decency,” Booker said in his [introductory remarks](#). “These are not normal times in our nation. And they should not be treated as such in the United States Senate.”

Booker castigated the Senate and his own party for failing to stand up to Trump. He said he hoped his speech would encourage others to take heart and take a stand.

The question for Booker is: Do you think anyone heard what you had to say? His move may have made an impression on the Democrats, who have been criticized for giving in to Trump, and the New Jersey senator accurately outlined dozens of times that happened. In a telling note, though Booker stood for 25 hours, he didn’t repeat himself much. Apparently it is possible, as Booker proved, that you could stand up and speak for a day straight and *still* not list every way Donald Trump has screwed the U.S. in his first 100 days back in office.

Senator Chuck Schumer and Chris Coons and others stood time and again, thanking Booker for doing what he did and commending him for pointing out the hypocrisy of the government in which they all participate. They listened. But, it

remains to be seen what, if anything, will be done by Congress to check Donald Trump. “We live in a country where we don’t ask what we can do for our country,” Booker said, paraphrasing President John F. Kennedy. “We live in a country where we ask what can you do for Donald Trump?”

Trump probably smiled at that when he heard it. Hell, he probably thought about that and smiled as he delivered his “Liberation Day” tariffs Wednesday. He loves it when people say his name.

Booker wondered out loud if government officials engaged in a discussion on the Signal app that mentions a pending U.S. military attack, the time in which it would happen and the weapons used, shouldn’t be held accountable for their sophomoric and potentially criminal actions. “Am I crazy?” he asked as he demanded the Senate conduct hearings on “*Signalgate*.”

But the White House has already said they’re done with that issue. Moving on. Nothing to see here. By Wednesday, it was all about the tariffs. All about Trump. And Trump acknowledged how great he was on several occasions as he continued to tell us how ineffective and feckless everyone else has been.

Booker asked, “Where are the checks and balances in this dereliction of duties?”

Most economists and politicians predict trade wars, turmoil and increased international tension because of Donald Trump’s “Liberation Day.” Our allies feel wronged and our enemies feel giddy at the prospect of Trump tearing the world asunder through tariffs.

Booker proposed an era of cooperation among congressional members (both Republican and Democrats) to put a check on Trump’s burn it to the ground mentality. But he probably won’t get it. Speaker of the House Mike Johnson and several congressional members of the GOP were present Wednesday in the Rose Garden. They appeared to be “all in” on Donald’s latest divergence from reality. Maybe not. I suppose the

smiling faces could mean they all have gas - kind of like when my infant granddaughter smiles.

We're the most powerful and wealthiest country on the planet, but Donald would have us believe there are "unfair" trade barriers, "unrelenting economic warfare" and the U.S. is headed to an economic collapse or "unilateral economic surrender," unless we issue tariffs. Most sane people believe it will be the tariffs that will lead to the economic downfall that Trump says we are currently facing. Others, namely

those who've known him the longest, think Trump is filled with vile hatred and wants to burn the world down before he dies.

One guest speaker at the Trump event said he couldn't wait to see what will happen six months from now. Trump himself said April 2, 2025, will go down "as the most important day in modern American history."

He may be right. But I don't think that means what he thinks it means.