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5 on 45:
On Trump's upcoming speech to Congress

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PITA: You're listening to 5 on 45 from the Brookings Podcast Network: analysis and commentary from Brookings experts on today's news regarding the Trump administration.

(Music)

HUDAK: My name is John Hudak and I'm a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies and the deputy director for the Center for Effective Public Management. On Tuesday night, President Trump will give an address to a joint session of Congress, the first of its kind for his administration. The speech is really an opportunity for the president to step outside of the type of rhetoric and the type of speeches and the types of conversations he's been having so far. This will be the biggest speech the president will give since the Inaugural Address, and even though it will be covered by national and international media, and even though some consider the speech to be an address to the American public, it really isn't. This is a conversation between the president and Congress. This is not the time for a campaign speech, it's not the time to rehash the size of his electoral win, it's not the time to trash the media. He did an effective job of that at CPAC last week. Instead, he needs to pivot. He has to take the time to talk to Congress about what his legislative presidency will look like. He needs to talk about the types of policies that he needs to work with Congress to achieve, and discuss how those promises and those policies will help the American people.

This speech to a joint session of Congress is time for detail. It's not time for denouncements. President Trump not only needs to change the tone that he takes when giving a public address, but he seriously needs to change the words. What the American public, what members of the House and members of the Senate, and the

media are looking for Tuesday night is the president to lay out a vision, to detail that vision, and to talk about how President Trump wants to address the nation's most serious problems and how the policies that he supports will achieve that.

It's also important for President Trump to address the elephant in the room. That is that not every one of his policies are things that the Republicans in Congress are willing to give him. That's something that's going to be very difficult for the Trump administration to begin to understand as these policies move forward in Congress. It also signals something quite important to the Trump administration, and that is that even though Republicans control both houses of Congress, the majorities in both of the chambers are relatively small. That means for a lot these policies, on a lot of these issues, President Trump is going to need to work with Democrats. And so, Tuesday night's speech cannot be one where President Trump lambasts Democrats, calls them down to dirt, criticizes Hillary Clinton, and sounds like the campaign-style speeches that he's given in the past. Instead, it needs to be the beginning of a conversation in which the Trump administration extends an olive branch, understanding that just because the president wants something doesn't mean the president will necessarily get it.

Dealing with Congress is one of the hardest things that any president has to do, and it's something that President Trump has not had to do too much of yet, other than the confirmation process for his Cabinet nominees. Tuesday night begins that process. It begins the president's interactions with the Congress. And if President Trump wants to be reelected in four years, if he wants his administration to be one that is successful in terms of producing the types of policies that Americans elected him to do in the first

place, then that conversation, that process, that cooperative process with the Congress needs to begin Tuesday night and continue throughout the next four years.

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