

President Trump? Businesses are sharply split

By [Stacy Wescoe](#), April 18, 2016



Donald Trump on the campaign trail. 'There's an enormous difference between politics and government,' says Fred Levering of Berkshire Hathaway Homesale Realty in Wyomissing.

Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump is known best as a businessman. He's built an empire and celebrity based on his dealings as a successful, global commercial real estate professional.

As chairman and president of The Trump Organization, he describes himself as "the very definition of the American success story."

But will the entrepreneurial presidential hopeful's success in real estate and entertainment translate to success as a politician?

As Pennsylvania's April 26 primary nears, business leaders in the region have that very same question.

KEY BUSINESS-RELATED POSITIONS OF DONALD TRUMP

TAXES

- No business will pay more than 15 percent of its business income in taxes.
- For individuals, there will be four tax brackets of 0 percent, 10 percent, 20 percent and 25 percent. Single people earning less than \$25,000 and married couples earning less than \$50,000 won't owe income tax.

TRADE

- Declare China a currency manipulator.
- Eliminate China's illegal export subsidies.
- Renegotiate or break the North American Free Trade Agreement.

HEALTH CARE

- Fully repeal Obamacare.
- Allow individuals to fully deduct health insurance premium payments from their tax returns.

SOURCES: DONALD.J.TRUMP.COM AND NEWS REPORTS



Trump

Trump's promises to reform what he described as a complicated tax system and repeal "Obamacare" have won supporters in small business.

"He's a businessman," said Ralph Grauso, a financial adviser who runs ASC Financial Group with offices in Bartonsville and Allentown. "His tremendous business experience could benefit the small-business community."

However, the candidate's stance on foreign trade concerns those in manufacturing, and many wonder if a man used to business and not politics could get anything done in Washington at all.

"We don't believe him to be a responsible leader," said David Taylor, president of the Pennsylvania Manufacturers' Association in Harrisburg.

Trump's vocal supporters include small-business owners and entrepreneurs, most of whom seem to be seeking tax relief.

A survey by social network Manta this year showed that 62 percent of small-business owners felt the real estate mogul would be the best Republican candidate for small business.

Grauso said the tax burden on small-business owners is a big issue for him.

"I'm all for reducing taxation across the board, simplifying the tax code and reducing the corporate tax rate," Grauso said.

He said he believes the tax proposals put forth by Trump would help him and his firm.

“Under his plan, I’ll probably save \$100,000 a year, and I would invest that back in my business,” Grauso said. “I’d spend it on something that would bolster the economy.”

Some of the most business-centric issues that Trump has publicly commented on are issues with regard to free trade.

He’s described the United States trade status with China as tilted in China’s favor and decried China’s inclusion in the World Trade Organization during the Clinton administration.

He also called the North American Free Trade Agreement a “disaster” that needs to be renegotiated or broken.

Jack Pfunder, executive director of the Manufacturers Resource Center in Hanover Township, Lehigh County, disagreed with those assessments.

He said both North American and Chinese trade have benefited U.S. and Lehigh Valley manufacturers.

Pfunder noted that while wages are higher in the U.S. than in China and Mexico, the U.S. has such high productivity it makes the nation much more attractive for manufacturing.

He said when assessing convenience to market and other factors, many companies are establishing or re-establishing manufacturing operations in the U.S. and Lehigh Valley. China, he said, isn’t a nation we really want to be alienating right now.

Taylor of the Pennsylvania Manufacturers’ Association said that while some of the points Trump has made about defending American employers against foreign trade are valid, he said taking a stand against a trade deficit with China is a bit of an oversimplification of foreign trade issues.

“It doesn’t make you a protectionist to recognize that issue,” Taylor said.

Health care reform is another big concern with business leaders in the region – although when asked, many said they were not informed enough on Trump’s plans to talk about them.

Among the issues Trump has spoken about are increased transparency in health care provider costs and allowing taxpayers to take deductions for health care premiums.

He also said he would work to immediately repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare. It's a plan that some in the business world still are unhappy about.

Trump in the past supported a single-payer system, such as that in Canada and many European nations. But Frank Master, owner of MCS Industries Inc. in Palmer Township, said Trump the candidate seems to have backed off on that stance.

Master, an advocate for a single-payer system who recently funded a documentary on the subject of health care reform, "Fix It – Healthcare at the Tipping Point," said had Trump stuck to his original stance, he might be more likely to support him, at least on that issue.

But now, he said, Trump's stance on health care reform has morphed into a different animal.

Master said he also is not a fan of Obamacare and its multipayer system, noting that his health care premiums have seen double-digit increases the past few years.

But aside from axing Obamacare – which would have to be done through congressional action – Master said Trump's proposals on reforming health care are fairly vague. Master said he sees no actionable plans in Trump's platform that would dramatically improve the nation's health care system.

Perhaps the biggest question of area business leaders isn't what Trump will do about taxes, health care or foreign trade, but whether or not – as president – he could do anything at all.

"There's an enormous difference between politics and government," said Fred Levering, broker for Berkshire Hathaway Homesale Realty in Wyomissing. "In government, you have to get things done."

Del Markward, president and CEO of the Markward Group in Upper Macungie Township, said that while he likes Trump and thinks his simply holding the post would mean a slight uptick for the economy, he still doubts what the celebrity businessman could get done in the White House.

"Any president who sits in that office is going to have to deal with Congress," Markward said.

While he said Trump might have an easier ride than President Barrack Obama has had, Markward said he still believes Trump would "have difficulty getting any real legislation passed."

Levering questioned whether Trump would have the ability to compromise and simply may be too accustomed to getting his way.

“He is the epitome of the entrepreneur, making deals largely on his own,” Levering said. “Government is different. You have to work with other people with different agendas and big egos.”

Taylor said that while Trump has called NAFTA “a disaster,” it is a Trump presidency that the Pennsylvania Manufacturers’ Association believes would be a disaster for business and industry.

“There is no way to know what he’s going to do,” Taylor said. “He would create terrible instability that would further damage our economy.”

His organization felt so strongly against Trump that it boycotted a December Republican Fundraiser in Philadelphia that featured Trump as a speaker.

“God forbid he gets elected,” Taylor said. “There’s no way to know what he would do.”