



President Trump Meets With Union Leaders On First Business Day In Office: Should Employers Be Worried?

Insights

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On Monday, President Trump's first full business day in the White House, the newly sworn-in president met with a consortium of about a dozen union leaders and members for what was described as a "listening session." Although he had met with a similarly sized group of business executives and leaders earlier in the day, some employers might be nervous to learn about this union meeting. However, if early reports about the meeting are any indication, employers should have little concern about the meeting, which seemed to be more about job creation than labor law.

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs

President Trump campaigned on a platform heavily focused on job creation, especially the restoration of manufacturing jobs for blue collar workers. In his Inauguration speech last week, he criticized past administrations that he claims sat by while "the jobs left and the factories closed," painting a bleak picture of "rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation."

During the portion of Monday's meeting open to the press, President Trump announced to the assembled labor leaders that he had formally withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which drew applause from those in attendance. It is the administration's belief that the trade deal can be renegotiated to better aid the manufacturing sector and create jobs, a belief shared by many of the union leaders in attendance. The remainder of the meeting was closed to the press, but reports have leaked out providing a glimpse into its substance.

Construction Unions Well Represented

Most of the union leaders were from the construction sector, representing carpenters, sheet metal workers, general construction workers, plumbers, and welders. This would seem to support the notion that the new president will prioritize infrastructure construction as one of his early priorities. Sure enough, Sean McGarvey, president of North America's Building Trades Unions, told his constituents after the meeting that the president's message was that he would seek to hire American workers to rebuild roads, bridges, schools, and other projects.

But What About Labor Law?

But were other promises made to union leaders that would give employers pause? Specifically, did the president indicate that he would support Big Labor's agenda as a repayment for the strong union vote he received in key battleground states?

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It seems doubtful. Remember, many unions are opposed to the president's selection of Andrew Puzder as Secretary of Labor, seen as too cozy with business interests. There were no indications that the president used yesterday's listening session to express reservations about his choice for the DOL's top spot. Further, unions have become increasingly vexed with the spread of right-to-work laws across the country – most recently in Kentucky, the 27th state to pass such a law. And yesterday's meeting included no signals that Trump was backing down with his avowed support for right-to-work laws.

The administration will be performing somewhat of a balancing act when it comes to refining its view of how federal labor and employment law should be interpreted and implemented. On the one hand, the president campaigned and won on a platform promising a reduction of burdensome regulations that have hampered employers in recent years. On the other hand, the president also directly focused on union workers when seeking votes, and those workers will want to see their loyalty repaid in the near future. It will be interesting to see whether the president can balance these two priorities in carrying out his agenda, especially in the early days of his administration. We will monitor developments and update you as events warrant.

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