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An Ethical President Elect?

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REL 327 Business Ethics

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Intro

Today, many still sit in astonishment as to what happened just one short month ago. To some, it was devastating. To others, it looked more like all the makings of a new beginning. Regardless, one statement I think most can agree on, no one could've seen the results of the 2016 United States Presidential Election coming. When Donald Trump surpassed the needed electoral college votes, he became the new president elect for this upcoming four-year term. This seemed to be the cherry on top of what quickly became a controversial presidential campaign.

As I developed my own perspectives over the course of his pre-presidential journey, I can say with confidence that many actions made and words said, by then *candidate* Trump, weren't held to the most presidential of ethical standards. Throughout his ad campaigns on television, his tweets and postings on social media outlets, and his stances expressed through interviews and speeches, Trump has chosen against being ethically sound in his efforts.

This journey hasn't been a short lived one either. On multiple occasions, in regards to his business, Trump has found himself with frequently poor standards. He has hinted at seeing himself as smart for not paying his fair share of government taxes. USA Today reported that "Trump has refused to pay hundreds of contractors – from carpenters to painters to even his own lawyers. Trump and his companies face 60 or more lawsuits as well as liens and judgments" (USA Today). He has continued to slander his opponents by running negative ads against them, as well as attacking religions such as Islam, proposing to disallow travel into the country by

Muslims because he believes that there is “great hatred towards Americans by large segments of the Muslim population” (CNN Politics).

The unethical list of Donald Trump goes on. But, that isn't why I'm here writing this essay today. Actually its more the opposite, if anything. Donald Trump is the new president elect of our great nation, and there is nothing that can change that. I think it's time we start to move forward with an open mind and set aside our political egos. In the body of this essay, I will address President Elect Trump's plan for his first one hundred days as POTUS and his overall vision of our country for his next four years in office. I will recognize his major political points of emphasis, as well as analyze their ethics. It is important that as we move forward as a nation that we are well educated about what direction our leaders are trying to take us in.

According to the Wall Street Journal, “nearly seven in 10 American adults are convinced [Trump] is the change agent he promised, but the public is divided over the kind of transformation he may bring to the federal government” (Wall Street Journal). It is clear that many Americans firmly believe that Donald Trump is the face of change for the United States. A Wall Street Journal and NBC News poll “finds that 68% of Americans believe Mr. Trump will change the way business is conducted in Washington. But one-third of that group-or about 20% of all adults-believe it will be the wrong kind of change” (Wall Street Journal). It has become apparent that our nation is curious whether or not we have chosen the most ethical option to be our president. I believe that if we look at the plan Trump has laid out for us then we can see for ourselves which moves are going to impact the U.S. ethically, and which unethically.

Trump's 100 Day Plan

To find the layout for Donald Trump's said plan for his first 100 days in office, all one needs to do is go to his website www.donaldjtrump.com. Here he, not too specifically, describes each act and measure he intends to implement into the heart of the American government system. On his first page, he describes the "Six measures to clean up the corruption and special interest collusion in Washington, DC" as well as "Seven actions to protect American workers" and "Five actions to restore security and the constitutional rule of law" (Donald Trump). When we look to the next page of his written statement, we find various different acts listed in which he hopes to have passed into legislation. These acts include solutions to prevent U.S. companies from taking their business outside of the country, to repealing "Obamacare" and replacing it with an act that will allow citizens to purchase health insurance across state lines, making it a newly competitive business.

As Donald Trump includes many different objectives he wishes to have accomplished in his first 100 days, writing about them all would make for an extremely long exposition. Thus, in the following I will highlight what I believe to be the more important ones and discuss their ethicalness as well.

Trump's Seven Actions to Protect the American Worker

On the front page of his legislation plan, Trump lists seven steps, so to speak, in regards to how he will be promoting working American citizens. Trump has made clear in his speeches and debates that the American Worker is important to his plan for our nation. He believes that they need a larger voice in that of a leader in order to have personal success and impact the overall success of the country. To kick-start this movement, Trump appointed fast-food CEO

Andy Puzder head of his Department of Labor. In Trump's eyes, he sees a successful businessman that will help create the 25 million jobs that Trump has promised almost any time he has taken the podium. But, some are nervous that this new appointee doesn't necessarily hold the same values as the everyday working American. Newsweek recently reported that "Puzder's history of profits before people by opposing reasonable increases to the minimum wage and leading a company that violates labor standards" is quite contradictory to fighting for the American Worker and that this "should be a concern to us all" (Newsweek). Ethical? It's hard to say, considering we haven't been able to observe any actions taken yet. I would say that this isn't necessarily the start you'd want, if anything. I can understand that to build business, you need a businessman. But, I would also say to build up people, you need a people person. And the past has shown that Puzder may have his people at heart.

Most important to Trump and his seven actions is his intention to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or to withdraw from the deal completely under Article 2205 (which gives presidents power to make decisions regarding NAFTA). If you have paid attention to even a brief portion of the presidential debates on TV, or tuned in to a televised Trump rally, I am sure you might have heard the President Elect going on about how terrible NAFTA is for our country. NAFTA is an agreement between the United States, Canada, and Mexico that involves pre-determined trading agreements and tariffs between each country. Trump has made statements about the agreement such as "NAFTA is the worst trade deal maybe ever signed anywhere, but certainly ever signed in this country" (Politifact). Clearly he believes NAFTA was not the right direction for the U.S., and many find his opinion on the matter to be reliable considering this field of business and trade is what he has been successful in most of his

life. But, as the site Politifact lays out (a political fact-checking website) “Trump’s claim that NAFTA is the worst deal ever fails on a couple of points” doesn’t hold up (Politifact).

First off, the consensus among U.S. economists isn’t necessarily that it has been successful, but more so that when it comes down to jobs created versus jobs cost, it’s basically a tie. The Congressional Research Service states that “NAFTA did not cause the huge job losses feared by the critics or the large economic gains predicted by supporters. The net overall effect of NAFTA on the U.S. economy appears to have been relatively modest” (Congressional Research Service). This doesn’t mean that certain industries within the country didn’t suffer as a result of the agreement. A study conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development showed that businesses specializing in appliances and other home goods such as clothing were negatively impacted even though jobs were being created somewhere else in the economy. Nonetheless, the NAFTA agreement isn’t the epic failure Donald Trump is making it out to seem. In fact, it is actually the decision to give China permanent “most favored nation” status as the more critical job killer, most prominent in manufacturing (Politifact).

To analyze Trump’s decision-making skills in this part of his 100 day plan, we have to consider the consequences of destroying NAFTA. After intensive research, it isn’t quite clear the outcome of such a move, because the U.S. hasn’t backed out of a trade agreement since the late 1800s. But, a few scenarios projected by CNN Money see Trump either renegotiating a deal that either impacts very little change on trade, or sends our country into a trade war. By giving the president power to levy tariffs on Mexico and Canada without congressional approval, thus hurting huge firms such as GM, IBM, and Coca-Cola, whose manufacturing takes place in Mexico and is then imported back into the United States.

So, ethically speaking, to take a chance at repealing NAFTA is to place Americans into a high-risk high-reward situation. At Trump's discretion, we will shortly be entering such a scenario and find out the true consequences soon. And to put American Workers and firms founded in the USA at risk of job loss because of cutbacks due to higher tariff costs/costs to remain in optimum functionality. If Trump's steps pan out, it could result in a highly ethical choice. But, as we have no idea the outcome except to be warned of negative impacts against ourselves, it also may result in a fairly unethical action. Because we are unsure of the outcome, and because Trump is making the decision based off of what he believes will put the country in a better economic standpoint, his call to renegotiate and/or withdraw from NAFTA is, as of now, an ethical judgement call.

Repeal and Replace Obamacare Act

One of President Barack Obama's largest accomplishments while in the White House for his almost 8 years now, is being able to pass the Affordable Care Act which has provided over 20 million people who were previously denied access to affordable healthcare, the ability to obtain cheaper health insurance through Medicare and Medicaid. Although in my opinion this is a great feat, many Republicans, along with Trump, don't agree with the rise in premiums and that not everyone should be required to have health insurance if they don't want to. Trump agrees with a few points that the Affordable Care Act draws out, such as going easier on those with pre-existing conditions (although his plan would most likely make it more expensive for those with such conditions to have healthcare). For the most part, though, he sees *Obamacare* as standing in the way of American citizens' rights.

So, what does this mean for our country and, more importantly, is this choice ethical? Well, as opposed to the decision with NAFTA where we don't really know the effects of its repeal until we get there, we know what will happen to 22 million people if the Affordable Care Act is no more. According to www.trumpcare.com, a site that has in depth analyzation of both Obama's current plan and Trump's proposal, implementing the President Elect's new plan "would take away insurance from some 22 million people, while his proposed replacement plan for health insurance coverage, based on allowing companies to sell insurance state to state and changing the tax treatment of health care policies bought by individuals, would only help about 1 million" (trumpcare.com). As you can see, it's a little unbalanced to say the least. Although Trump's plan would lower premiums as well as overall cost of insurance because of his "no borders" approach, it still wouldn't even come close to impacting as many lives as the current plan does today.

To appeal President Obama's healthcare plan is to go against what being president stands for: making a country where every single American has the opportunity to not only survive, but thrive. Because of this, Donald Trump's new plan to repeal the Affordable Care Act would be a very obvious unethical decision. Even though he might believe he is making the right choice to help America, the research shows that he unfortunately is in the wrong here.

What Have We Learned?

Now that we have taken a closer look at President Elect Donald Trump's plan for his first one hundred days in office, it's time to figure out what all of this ultimately means. As Trump and his overall ethical breakdown, it's hard to say for sure exactly where he falls until we see how each one of his proposed plans take effect. As of now, a majority of his plans are ethical in

that he believes they will benefit the U.S. government and its people. But, for some large changes such as repealing NAFTA, it is unclear how ethical the decision will turn out. And we also see a few plans like the end of the Affordable Care Act already showing signs of unethicalness. I think one thing that is for sure: we still have to wait and see how Donald Trump being president and his first 100 day plan truly take flight in the United States. Until then, I honestly believe that we must keep an open mind to the ideas and perspectives that lay in front of us. If we keep fighting what inevitably is coming to us, we are just wasting time. We must come together as an American body and become a proactive group, taking action to help shape Trump's plans along with him. I believe that although he has shown some areas where he has been unethical before, he is now trying to take the steps he thinks will be the best for this awesome place we call home. Although it might affect all of our lives at some point, Donald Trump's plans will never change the freedoms we have as American citizens, and as such, we must continue to try and become a unit working as one.

I think it is important that we pay attention to Donald Trump and his ethics as time goes on, and I also think it is important to pay attention to ethics in every aspect of our country and our lives. This class has given me a new perspective on where I spend my money, how I see different corporations, and has even helped open my mind regarding a certain president elect I thought I might never understand. And at the end of the day, that's what I think ethics is all about. Being able to understand different viewpoints, apply your own, and ultimately hold yourself and others accountable to make the most ethical decisions we can.

Thanks Dr. Lee for a great five weeks.

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