

IMAGINING A TRUMP PRESIDENCY



DRIVEN TO RUN

Donald Trump tells Newsmax's Kathleen Walter he's fed up with the dismal state of U.S. affairs that's left America's image tarred.



Donald Trump says America is in trouble . . . and he's just the guy to save it.

By Tom Squitieri

FOR MONTHS NOW, FLAMBOYANT real estate mogul and marketing master Donald Trump has been telling anyone who'll listen that he's really considering a 2012 run for president. Seriously. He's not kidding. He means it this time.

America has been down this road with Trump before, of course. He hinted at White House aspirations in 1988 and again in 2000. But it seems different this time. His assertions are less bravado and more genuine concern for the state of a nation that made him rich, then broke, then rich again. "It's sad what's happened

to the country,” Trump told MSNBC when the spirit first moved him to consider the 2012 race. “We’re no longer a respected nation, and we should be the most respected. The world is laughing at us. We’re a punching bag.”

That kind of earnestness, coupled with a wide-open Republican field and perhaps the greatest name recognition in the history of human names, demands that Trump’s ideas be taken seriously.

Trump says he’d run on the GOP ticket and is willing to spend \$200 million of his own money in pursuit of the White House.

Republican pollster David Winston says, “Given the issues — jobs and the economy — 2012 is not going to be about personalities. It’s going to be about ideas. This is not going to be a beauty contest.”

Sal Russo, a top Republican campaign consultant who now leads the Tea Party Express, agrees. “Trump has a tremendous amount of energy and is close to experienced [advisers] who will have a realistic view of what it takes,” Russo tells Newsmax. “He is not a babe in the woods.”

Beauty contest or not, if Trump can run, maybe Trump can win. Which raises the question: What would a Donald Trump presidency look like? When you get past the obvious jokes about renaming the White House after himself or dispatching staffers with a brusque “You’re fired!” what do you get with a government run by a guy renowned for his business savvy, his fearlessness, his resilience, and his hair?

If he were to win, it could be Wendell Willkie’s acumen meets Teddy Roosevelt’s swagger. Or, it could resemble the second coming of James Buchanan.

Trump in Charge

In an interview with Newsmax, Trump says he’s already honing his vision for governance: securing America’s economic future, making other nations play by the same economic rules, limiting U.S. military actions, and diversifying the nation’s economy — even taxing the very wealthy to reduce the deficit.

His image as an entrepreneur and tycoon aside, Trump seems focused on matters that resonate with the scores of Americans concerned that the nation is on the decline.

When it comes to foreign policy, Trump’s America would look very different from Obama’s — or Bush’s, or Clinton’s, or pretty much any other president’s in this century or last. He’s hawkish on issues such as North Korea’s nuclear program, which he’d consider using force to stop. But in the rest of the world, there would be little in the way of foreign humanitarian intervention. Under Trump, the military would respond only to direct threats.

Israel would continue to have a loyal friend in the United States, but beyond that, America would quit

being the world’s police force. There would be no missile defense, something Trump calls “inappropriate.” National security would be a matter of tightening the borders and preparing citizens for a bioterror attack, he says. For a guy seen as quintessentially American, and a bit of an isolationist, Trump has no shortage of ideas for how to deal with the rest of the globe.

“The South Koreans see how we are protecting them and they give us nothing,” Trump says. “They take our money and load us with their products. Then the North Koreans come, and they are nice to us. We have our ships and we are going to fight for them. Why are we doing this? When I see the deficit going up to fight wars and defend the world,

somebody has to do something,” Trump adds. “In Iraq, we went to war with the wrong people. Saddam Hussein used to kill terrorists. Now Iraq is the Harvard for terrorists.”

The U.S. economy could be improved by dealing straight with those not being fair to America, he says. “What is OPEC but 12 men sitting around the table and ripping us off?” Trump says. “When the economy gets good, the oil prices go up. So when they raised the price of oil in what normally would be considered an illegal monopoly, I watch all these characters say how this country will recover while OPEC is sucking the blood out of this country.”

Trump is outraged at the amount of U.S. money going to make other countries soar into the 21st century

while America lags. “You ever see that sign at LaGuardia that says welcome to New York? It is on rotten two-by-fours. It looks rotten. You go to Qatar, and you see airports that are like the eighth wonder of the world. It is absolutely outrageous.”

Trump vows that, in a country that he would run, “China and others would not be taking advantage of us any longer.”

At home, a Trump government would be a smaller government as well. Trump embraces the tea party’s core belief that government should do public works and public safety and little else.

In addition to their policies, presidents are often gauged by their social stances as well as the kind of Supreme Court choices they’d

make while in office. With Trump in power, the country would get a mixed bag of libertarian guidance.

The government would swiftly and harshly prosecute hate crimes against gays but also stand strongly for capital punishment.

“He’s sort of branded himself as the best of both worlds,” says Robert Thompson, a professor of popular culture at Syracuse University. “He’s ‘one of the guys.’ He makes fun of himself, in movies and all over the place. He endorses products, many of which are by no means elitist kinds of things.”

Thompson says Trump is unabashed: “At the same time, he’s also this no-nonsense multibillionaire who is not afraid to remind us of that fact. So he certainly has created this character for himself that taps into a lot of things that a lot of people might like.”

Things such as no government investment of retirement funds and repeal of the inheritance tax, both key features of the Trump platform.

Trump once urged imposing a one-time, 14.25 percent tax on wealth, to erase national debt.

That would raise \$5.7 trillion to erase the nation’s debt, save \$200 billion in annual interest payments, help save Social Security and slash taxes for the middle class, and, he says, increase his personal tax bill by at least \$725 million.

Universal healthcare? We’d all have it. Guns? Not so much. Trump would push for assault weapons bans, waiting periods, and stricter background checks. Americans would get school choice and lose soft money in elections. Labor unions, he makes clear, would be in a lot of trouble on his watch.

Getting There

For now, populist generalizations and a lack of specificity are perfectly appropriate for an unannounced dark horse like Trump. When he finally throws his hat in the ring, he knows he’ll need a lot more details — and face a lot more scrutiny.

Trump tells Newsmax he will not make a decision until June, which



— Trump on Trump —

In an exclusive interview with Newsmax, Donald Trump dishes on war, the economy, foreign policy, and the politics of making it in America. Here’s what’s on the mogul’s mind:

■ **Political affiliations:** I respect the tea party, but I am a Republican, so I would be running as a Republican. I respect what they stand for. I like that they are fighting certain battles — and that’s what I’m going to be doing.

■ **OPEC:** It should be illegal. If you have a store and I have a store, and we collude and set prices, we go to jail. Here you have 12 men: They sit around a table and set the price of oil.

■ **Middle East:** Frankly, the region is a tinderbox. It’s going to explode.

■ **Oil prices:** With proper leadership, it could go down to \$40 a barrel. If we continue the way it is going, it’ll be up to \$150 a barrel.

■ **China:** Our products are better. I want to buy an American product, but the Chinese products are cheaper. They’re not as good — they’re just cheaper, and it’s not because of workers. It’s because of the manipulation of the currency.

■ **Economic threats:** Our jobs are being stolen by other countries. I don’t think inflation is a bigger threat. The fact is, we’re not going to have any jobs here pretty soon.

■ **Federal bailouts for states:** The federal government has no money. The money has been used for fighting wars and being policemen for other countries.

■ **Afghanistan:** We go to Afghanistan, we build a road, we build a highway, we build a school at the end of the highway. The school gets blown up, the road gets blown up, and we start it all over again. Why aren’t we building roads in Alabama? We should be out of there as soon as possible.

■ **The housing market:** It’s really a mess with all of the government nonsense and all of these subsidies. It’s actually a great time for people to buy houses, but the banks

have really let us down. Somebody has to get these banks moving. They have not treated the country properly.

■ **The European debt crisis:** Let Germany handle it. Germany is strong because of us. We buy lots of Mercedes-Benzes and other German cars. We wish them a lot of luck.

■ **Loving the USA:** I’ve done well in the country. I love the country, and I hate what’s happening to it. The way we’re going, this country will not be as great a country as it was, and that’s very, very sad to me. So many bad things are happening. There’s so much waste going on, and it’s destroying America.

gives him time to finish the current season of *The Celebrity Apprentice*, finalize pending business, as well as assess the rest of the possible candidates.

"I will look at the factors then, where we are on some things, how the country is," Trump says. "Then I will decide."

Before then, Trump says he needs to focus on other more immediate business and entertainment concerns — giving him time to study the possibility of a run as well as collect ongoing feedback about what happens if he decides to go for it. "Lots of polls are coming and some say I will do well. People see that, they see that I understand."

Trump insists that this is the first time he has been serious about running, as opposed to past presidential flirtations, notably when he conducted a mini campaign in 1999-2000 for the Reform Party presidential nomination.

"People wanted me to run [in 2000], and I never accepted that. We tested the idea — I could have done very well." This time, Trump says, he is the one driving the talk and consideration.

What passes for the most solid piece of data is the formation of a website, ShouldTrumpRun.com, which is conducting online polls aimed to boost buzz about Trump running. The site was launched by four individuals, including Michael Cohen who works as Trump's special counsel. Cohen said he created the site without Trump's knowledge or approval, something that strains the credibility issue.

"My intention in creating the site is to develop a grass-roots movement to use the Internet and our . . . contacts to spread the word that this country, now more than ever, needs someone like Donald Trump in the White House. We need a businessman who understands exactly how the other guy thinks. No more career politicians; we've seen what they have done," Cohen, who works as Trump's special counsel, says to ABC News.

Roger Stone, a longtime Trump adviser, wrote a column last fall saying Trump should not run. But Stone has reversed course and now is thinking of ways to boost the effort. "Trump is a patriot and all-American," Stone tells



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Newsmax. "He is disgusted by the way the Chinese are kicking our a**s and, based on the history of the British and Russian experience in Afghanistan, is opposed to wasting money and lives there. If he became convinced he was the only American who could save the country, he would run."

Stone said he's planning a poll for New Hampshire to test the waters.

Playing the Long Shot

Not everyone is so taken by Trump's sudden interest in public service, however. "More than likely, this is just a striptease to get his name mentioned by TV anchors," says Larry Sabato of the University of Virginia, who has an enviable record in political prognosticating.

Jordan Lieberman, a longtime political consultant and former publisher of *Campaigns & Elections' Politics* magazine, observes: "It would take a moron to think

a flamboyant businessman can win the presidency in 2012. And Donald Trump is no moron. But he understands the value in chatter about his big aspirations. It's great for business."

Gerald N. Rosenberg, associate professor of political science at the University of Chicago, is less charitable. "Unlike Ross Perot, who had a deep and long-lasting commitment to education reform, an issue he had worked on for years, Donald Trump appears committed only to Donald Trump," Rosenberg tells Newsmax. "He will draw lots of attention away from serious candidates, perhaps creating a circus-like atmosphere in the Republican primaries. If he runs as an independent I think he will be like a meteor; he'll flare for a second and then burn out."

Russo says Trump would have to invest a tremendous amount of energy and organization to be taken seriously as a 2012 presidential candidate. Ironically, because Trump is perceived as wealthy, he most likely will have trouble raising money, Russo notes: "People will say he has more than I have. Trump will have to dig deep for it."

Russo and others also are not sure that Trump could make it through the pre-election process.

"He would have to touch a lot of the base. He can't be totally nontraditional, especially since job creation and the economy were central in this last election," Russo says.

"Donald Trump has broad name recognition, as opposed to serious but largely unknown people like Congressman Mike Pence and Governor Mitch Daniels, and that will get you on the long list of people mentioned at possible candidates for president at the early stage of the 2012 race," says Cal Jillson, a political science professor at Southern Methodist University and author of several political books.

"The problem for Trump is that what people know about him is not flattering. Americans have been shaken by the economic events of the past three years, so they will be looking for experience and competence and that is not what they will see in Trump." □

