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 [dc0da86d142a1315df0e6a7067008404.jpg](#) Shedding his anti-business label could prove more daunting than President

Obama anticipated, with the warring interests of small-business owners and large corporations competing for favorable policies. As part of a larger, year-end image makeover that has the president edging back toward the political center, the White House on Wednesday invited 20 corporate chief executive officers to meet with Obama privately at Blair House, across the street from the White House.

"For me, the most important question about an economic idea is not whether it's good short-term politics or meets somebody's litmus test," Obama said. "It's whether it will help spur businesses, jobs and growth."

The administration from the beginning has been sharply at odds with some business interests, notably the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which opposed health care reform and Wall Street reform, and helped finance campaign ads against Democrats in the midterm elections.

The Business Roundtable, an independent group of prominent business leaders, also has been critical of his administration, particularly on financial regulations and other initiatives.

More recently, Obama's recent trade pact with South Korea -- coupled with a vow to double exports in five years -- and a bipartisan tax cut package that includes tax breaks and incentives for business, are being received as the start of a new thaw.

"With the uncertainties of this new Congress and what the priorities will be, you at least hold the hope that there will be an increased receptivity to the concerns of business by the administration," said Marc Gerson, a tax policy expert and partner at Miller & Chevalier.

Gerson said business will be looking to future legislative efforts and especially the upcoming federal budget process to gauge the administration's commitment.

John Fortier, a political scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, said the larger political context of Obama's CEO summit is the president's ongoing effort to move toward the center.

"Obama said he thought he was miscast as a tax-and-spend liberal," Fortier said. "I actually had some doubts about whether he would be able to move to the middle, but this tax deal as a first move was really a big deal."

Chamber officials have also spoken warmly of Obama's tax cut proposal and trade deal. The president is expected to cross Lafayette Square to address the chamber next month.

Even so, Obama, who often speaks of small business as the key to economic recovery, may be focusing his pro-business restart on powerful CEOs and corporations at the expense of the little guy.

"The interests of small business are not necessarily the interests of big business," said Frank Knapp, president and CEO of the South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce.

Small-business interests liked health care and financial reform, Knapp said. They want more from Obama aimed at protecting and nurturing small-business interests.

Knapp noted the chamber opposed the Small Business Jobs Act and its \$30 billion lending fund, two Obama legislative items that helped small-business owners.

Dan Mitchell, a tax policy expert at the Cato Institute, called Obama's CEO summit "a dog and pony show."

"Where the rubber meets the road is in the legislation," Mitchell said. "Everyone gets something in this tax deal -- although the whole thing isn't very stable."

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