



President Trump To Cut Regulations By '75 Percent' — How Real Is That?

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In a meeting with business leaders, President Trump on Monday made an eyebrow-raising claim.

As part of an effort to make America more business-friendly, Trump said: "We think we can cut regulations by 75 percent. Maybe more, but by 75 percent."

Republicans do seem serious about some kind of regulatory reform. But even conservative economists say that number is not believable.

It has been said that the president likes to have an adversary. And at the meeting, Trump took aim at government regulations that stifle business.

"We're gonna be cutting regulation massively," the president said. "The problem with the regulation that we have right now is that you can't do anything. You can't, I have people that tell me they have more people working on regulations than they have doing product."

Of course, there are all kinds of government regulations. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration aims to keep workers safe. The Food and Drug Administration makes sure we have food that's safe to eat. The Environmental Protection Agency protects the environment.

Trump suggested that there wouldn't be a downside to the important goals of the nation's myriad federal regulations.

"Now we're gonna have regulation," he said, "and it's gonna be just as strong and just as good and just as protective of the people as the regulation we have right now."

"We're gonna take care of the environment, we're gonna take care of safety and all of the other things we have to take care of," said the president.

It's a bit unclear what Trump means when he says he thinks he can cut "75 percent" of regulations. Does that mean of all government regulations? Or 75 percent of the burden on American businesses overall? And even if that were possible, how could that be done with no downside to the important missions of regulators?

Peter Van Doren is an economist with the Cato Institute, a free-market think tank. He edits Cato's quarterly journal, *Regulation*. NPR asked him if Trump's "75 percent" statement was realistic or if it makes any sense.

Van Doren chuckled and said, "Well, President Trump, he's about signaling."

Van Doren says that as an economist, he's a bit more delicate than the media.

"We have all these fancy words for what you might call 'lying,' " Van Doren said. "This is a game and Trump is signaling his supporters that he's serious."

But Van Doren says if history is any guide, no president has been able to undo that many federal regulations. So Van Doren says it won't be 75 percent or even massive. "I think it's gonna be probably somewhere in the moderate to small range."

It appears this is the latest in a series of exaggerations or some previously reported falsehoods in the president's first few days in office.

Still, Republicans do seem serious about regulatory reform. Philip Wallach is a political scientist at the more liberal-leaning Brookings Institution. He says lawmakers are introducing bills such as "the SCRUB Act, which would create a commission specifically designed to find old regulations that are not worth their cost and get them revised or deleted."

Wallach thinks there could be some meaningful culling of regulations. He says some of that could be a good thing — to get rid of pointless red tape where it exists, if it's truly pointless.

He also notes that Republicans don't have a filibuster-proof 60 votes in the Senate. So Wallach says Democrats will have to choose their battles, but in many cases they could block the repeal of what they think are really good regulations.