

NATIONAL REVIEW

Donald Trump: The ‘Anti-Corporatist’ Candidate?

Is he the fierce anti-corporatist many of his supporters see him as?

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Of all the mystical qualities that Trump supporters attribute to their candidate, the one I find most curious is that Trump is the “anti-corporatist” candidate.

Trump? “Anti-corporatist”? Really?

If there were a corporatist hall of fame, Trump’s name should be emblazoned across the front in huge red letters, the way it is on his casinos. We are, after all, talking about a candidate who has just finished attacking his leading rival, Ted Cruz, for insufficient devotion to ethanol subsidies. This is not an aberration. Trump has rarely met a proposal for corporate welfare that he didn’t love.

Republicans have been highly critical of the Obama administration’s propensity to throw money at so-called “green energy” companies. But Trump is just as big a supporter of taxpayer subsidies for alternative energy sources. Defending his support of subsidies for wind turbines, for instance, Trump explained that “you need subsidies” because it can be hard for wind to be competitive in energy production, particularly when prices for fossil fuels are so low.

Trump’s support for corporate welfare can’t be explained away as pandering to key voter groups, either. It’s heartfelt and longstanding. As far back as 1986, Trump opposed Ronald Reagan’s tax reform because it eliminated corporate loopholes, including special tax breaks for real-estate developers; he warned that it would be “a disaster for the country.”

He was wrong, of course, about Reagan’s tax plan, but his tune hadn’t changed by 2009, when he backed TARP and the bailout of the big banks. In fact, Trump was willing to go even further, actually nationalizing the banks. As he told Larry King, “Whether they fund them or nationalize them, it doesn’t matter, but you have to keep the banks going.”

And it wasn’t just the banks. Trump also supported the Obama administration’s bailout of the auto industry and its unions. “I think the government should stand behind them 100 percent,” Trump told Fox News. “You cannot lose the auto companies. They’re great. They make wonderful products.”

Trump may have flip-flopped on all sorts of issues, but when it comes to corporations feeding at the public trough, he’s been steady as a rock.

Then there is Trump's long love affair with eminent domain. Trump has, of course, famously attempted repeatedly to use eminent domain to benefit his own business dealings, most notoriously when he encouraged the New Jersey Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, a government agency, to seize the home of Vera Coking, a 70-year-old widow, and turn the property over to him for development. In another instance, Trump asked the Connecticut government to condemn five Bridgeport businesses so that he could use the land for a business development.

Trump lost in both those cases, but he still resolutely defended the government's power to seize an individual's property for the benefit of private corporate interests. He enthusiastically backed the Supreme Court's *Kelo* decision, telling Fox's Neil Cavuto, "I happen to agree with it 100 percent. If you have a person living in an area that's not even necessarily a good area, and . . . government wants to build a tremendous economic development, where a lot of people are going to be put to work and . . . create thousands upon thousands of jobs and beautification and lots of other things, I think it happens to be good."

Even Trump's protectionist trade policy is essentially a corporatist subsidy for favored industries and unions at the expense of consumers and non-favored industries. There are a great many corporations — automakers, steel mills, textile companies — that would agree with him. Those of us who will have to pay more for everything we buy, not so much.

When it comes right down to it, Trump's entire anti-corporatist image rests on his opposition to immigration. And certainly, the Chamber of Commerce and other business groups support increased immigration. That's a fair debate. (In the interest of full disclosure, I admit that I believe that the free movement of people is a basic tenet of the free market.) But no matter what your position on immigration, wanting to build a wall hardly qualifies Donald Trump as the scourge of corporate special interests.

From congressional support for the Export-Import Bank to Marco Rubio's shilling for the sugar industry, too many Republicans believe that handouts to business are somehow less egregious than other forms of welfare. Trump's supporters should understand that their candidate *is* one of *those* Republicans.

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