

[2020 ELECTION](#)

Trump's economy is roaring. Will it carry him in 2020?

Analysis: Republicans say the president should focus more on the economy as he campaigns for a second term.



U.S. President Donald Trump reacts at a Make America Great Again rally at the Resch Center Complex in Green Bay, Wisconsin on April 27, 2019. Yuri Gripas / Reuters file

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By Jonathan Allen

WASHINGTON — There's really only one word — "boom!" — to describe the economic picture surrounding President Donald Trump 18 months away from the 2020 election.

On Friday, the [Labor Department announced that the economy added 263,000 jobs](#) and hourly wages grew by two-tenths of a percent in April. The unemployment rate — 3.6 percent — is at its lowest level since December 1969, before the births of nine of the Democrats running for his job.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average index of top stocks has been hovering near its record high in recent days, gross domestic product rose by 3.2 percent in the first quarter, and while some

Democratic candidates are making the case that income inequality means that most Americans aren't feeling real benefits from the big numbers, that message is competing both with the broader figures and other topics.

Trump's allies see a president who is competently leading the country in the right direction on jobs and the economy, the issues that typically matter most to voters, and a Democratic Party arguing for a 180-degree pivot at its own peril.

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"While Democrats are turning toward socialism and are wasting time attacking the president, the American economy is booming due to President Trump's tax cuts and deregulatory policies," said Boris Epshteyn, the chief political commentator for Sinclair Broadcast Group and a former special assistant to Trump in the White House.

"Fifty-year low unemployment, over 3 percent GDP growth, and a strong rise in wages are resulting in the over 55 percent approval rating for the president on the economy," he said in a text exchange with NBC News. "Going into 2020, the Trump economy is putting Democrats in an impossible position of trying to come up with ways they could do better."

Under normal circumstances, a president riding these economic numbers would be coasting toward a sweeping re-election.

But Trump's overall approval ratings have been consistently low, his matchup scores against potential Democratic rivals have been consistently unimpressive and his unwillingness to use his bully pulpit to keep the electorate focused on the good news for him remains almost inexplicable in traditional political terms.

"If Trump were to spend just one day a week and hammer the job numbers home, time and pressure would cause him to break through to move his approval rating upward," said Ron Bonjean, a Republican strategist at Rokk Solutions who helped guide Neil Gorsuch's Supreme Court confirmation.

"In order to politically leverage record job growth and unemployment, Trump has to spend time focusing on talking about them at a sustained level," Bonjean said over e-mail. "While most presidents would spend every waking moment hyping this good news, Trump isn't going to follow the manual. He will likely go for grabbing unrelated headlines because he enjoys that power."

The opportunity for Trump to use the economy to lift his fortunes may be there if only he seizes it — and if the economy continues to move on a positive track.

Trump's approval rating on the economy rose to 56 percent, [according to a CNN poll](#) released this week, and his overall number was up to 45 percent. But in the majority of recent [surveys of head-to-head matchups](#), Trump is trailing most of his top potential Democratic rivals.

But the Trump campaign, which is determined to bring new voters into the process to expand its coalition, has betrayed no concern about his approval numbers in independent polling.

Kayleigh McEnany, the campaign's spokeswoman, said Friday that the president has a better story to tell than his opponents.

"With this kind of momentum, we look forward to hearing the economic plans of the Democrats as they spin tales about Americans not feeling the results of the Trump economy, when in fact workers everywhere can feel the boom!" she said in a statement.

Mick Mulvaney, Trump's acting chief of staff and a former Republican House member from South Carolina, said Tuesday that a strong economy could override Americans' concerns about the president's personal conduct.

"People will vote for somebody they don't like if they think it is good for them," [Mulvaney said](#) in remarks made at a conference.

There were signs of reluctance among Democrats to discuss the economic numbers Friday. None of the top Democratic candidates — Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris or Pete Buttigieg — had tweeted about them as of noon.

Democratic strategist Chris Kofinis said Democrats need to tackle Trump head-on by pointing to the gap between the overall economic numbers and the experience of American workers who don't feel that their wages or keeping up or that their savings can withstand disruptions.

"The smart focus for Democrats is what real people are going through, not the fixation on unemployment numbers," he said in a telephone interview. "They see this profound income inequality that is paralyzing them. That is the true story of this economy. That is what Trump doesn't want to talk about, and that is what Democrats need to talk about."

Some of the Democratic candidates, particularly Warren and Sanders, have made income inequality and related issues the central focus of their campaigns. And Democrats won a House majority in the 2018 midterms primarily by campaigning against Republican efforts to dismantle Obamacare and its guarantee that insurance policies cover pre-existing medical conditions — a major financial issue for millions of Americans.

But it's far from the only issue Democrats are talking about — impeachment has been an obsession of late for their party — and that dilutes their ability to counter Trump's narrative about the economy.

While the economy is unpredictable and it will be 18 months before voters render a decision on Trump, no one disputes that the good numbers are better for him than the opposite. The big questions are whether the trend can continue, and whether he can take advantage of it.

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