



U.S. Chamber of Commerce

# 'A matter of survival': Small Businesses Speak Out on Tariffs

Tariffs are having a real and devastating impact on thousands of small businesses across the nation — and on all Americans in the form of higher prices.



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Small businesses around the country are speaking out about tariffs — the months of worrying about levies and countermeasures, trying to prepare amid uncertainty, and the impacts that came into devastating focus on April 2 as the Trump administration announced ["reciprocal" tariffs](#) on approximately \$3 trillion of imports.

As they spoke of the biggest tax increase in America in 50 years, they shared stories of canceled bookings, rising costs, stockpiling supplies, and, ultimately, the fear of having to pass the cost of tariffs on to consumers. Or worse.

Even those that can pass the cost on to customers immediately say they are worried the added costs will impact their ability to remain competitive and profitable — or to grow.

Here's what they're saying.

## Reaction to 'Liberation Day'

“The ongoing tariffs are having a direct impact on our vacation rental business, with cancellations from Latin American and Canadian guests and a noticeable drop in new bookings from these markets. While European travelers haven't begun canceling, they are holding off on making reservations, adding to the uncertainty. Combined with rising costs and broader economic volatility, these shifts are creating real pressure on our family business.”

— **Heleena Sideris**, general manager, Park City Lodging, Park City, Utah, and U.S. Chamber's Small Business Council member.

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“Hitting companies like mine with tariffs that will make a container of my product cost \$100,000 more doesn't help small businesses. It crushes us.”

— **Adam Fazackerley**, COO and co-founder, Lay-n-Go, Alexandria, Virginia, and U.S. Chamber Small Business Council member.

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“There is no predictability. ... I'm concerned about what a 25% tariff will do. I already know that my costs are increased, we're all just kind of holding our breath. ... Pie is a happy thing, and I want it to stay that way. I want people to be able to afford my product.”

— **Avid Renshaw**, founder, Mom's Apple Pie Company, Leesburg, Virginia, to [NBC4](#).

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“As a restaurant owner of five properties, we are closely monitoring the costs of all of our food, beverage, and equipment daily. Just this past week, we purchased \$3,000 in chafers on March 31 because they were going up 15% in price the next day, April 1. At our higher-end restaurant Urban Hill, we have purchased over \$10,000 in foreign wines over the past month to prepare for tariffs.”

— **Brooks Kirchheimer**, co-founder, Hill Top Hospitality, and a member of the U.S. Chamber's Small Business Council.

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“It's a big shock to the system. We're going to have no choice but to pass this on, a portion of it, to our customers. It's a matter of survival.”

— **Craig Freedman**, CEO, Freedman Seating, Chicago, Illinois, to [ABC 7 Chicago](#).

## Impact on Business Growth

“Our company, Bonsai Design, is an industry leader in the design and installation of world-class aerial adventure ranging from zip lines and drop towers to adventure parks. We rely heavily on steel as well as industry-specific materials in the global marketplace. Many of our materials are imported. These newly initiated tariffs could result in rising costs, which would cause us to lose our clients. We are concerned that the price increase of our raw materials and goods will be prohibitive for us to sell our products in the U.S. market.”

— **Sarah Shrader**, owner and co-founder, *Bonsai Design*, Grand Junction, Colorado

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“My company will feel an immediate, detrimental impact as a result of these tariffs. The threats and uncertainty have made it hard to make business decisions, and these kinds of tariffs will make it extremely difficult for small businesses like mine to grow.”

— **Traci Tapani**, co-president of *Wyoming Machine*, a sheet metal fabricator in Minnesota that purchases aluminum from Canada. Tapani serves as Vice-Chair of the U.S. Chamber’s Small Business Council.

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“We are a small custom metal products manufacturer. The increase in steel and aluminum tariffs directly impacts the input costs of our business, whether or not the metals we are buying are imported or not. Domestic producers are increasing their prices too...It's a simple tax increase for us that we can't absorb. We are raising our prices also, and seeing customers delay or cancel projects.”

— **Sandra Ryan**, vice president of operations, *Ryan Industries, Inc.*, Hillsboro, Oregon

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## Impact of Tariffs

Are tariffs impacting your business?

[Share Your Story](#)

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“The effect is the cost of our food goes up and affects profitability, affects paying wages — it affects everything ... It's been a struggle.”

— **Robby Naim**, co-owner, *Forgotten Bakery*, Sacramento, California, to [KXTV](#)

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“Ever since the announcement there was going to be tariffs on Mexico and Canada, we saw prices on all materials, including domestic materials, start to increase ... we're talking 75 cents or so on a case of any of our beverages being produced.”

— **Bill Baburek**, owner, *Crescent Moon*, Omaha, to [Omaha WOWT](#)

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## Scrambling to Adapt

Small business owners say tariffs will impact their ability to grow and hire and are already making them less profitable.

[Scrambling to Adapt](#)

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“[Lumber] has already been getting more expensive over the past few years due to supply chain shocks and wildfires, and a huge proportion of our lumber comes from Canada. These tariffs are going to make everything we do considerably more expensive, at a time when the high-priced housing market and high interest rates are already cutting into our bottom line.”

— **Bar Zakheim**, owner, *Better Place Design & Build*, San Diego, to [The Baltimore Sun](#)

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# “I can’t absorb the increased cost of a product.”

— Michael Howard, owner, Howard Family Designs, Warren, Michigan, to the New York Times

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“Small businesses run on very small margins. And so a 25% increase in any product is going to hurt. And we can’t just raise our prices every time the cost goes up to us. So we are losing a lot of money.”

— **Sarah Payne**, owner, *Denver Concrete Vibrator*, Denver, to the [Associated Press](#)

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## Anxious Business Owners

“Our company, DensityUSA, a security fog business located in St. Louis, Missouri, is concerned about experiencing significant challenges due to the looming threat of new tariffs, and the uncertainty surrounding potential retaliatory measures. As a growing small company, these tariffs and tariff threats could not only hinder our capacity to expand and create jobs but also serve as a substantial obstacle for many similarly situated small companies. While the negative impact of tariffs on consumers is well-known, it is crucial to recognize that they also pose serious barriers to growth for businesses like ours.”

— **Mike Egel**, president, *DensityUSA*, St. Louis, Missouri

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# “I’m very concerned. It’s just another tax. We’re getting taxed to death.”

— Dennis Percy, general manager of Fred’s Energy, whose trucks pick up energy in Canada and deliver it to customers in Northern Vermont, to The Boston Globe

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“We pursued our dreams 25 years ago and opened a manufacturing company for mountain bike components in Grand Junction, Colorado.

While we manufacture many of our products in the United States, we still import some key components and raw materials to support our production. And more importantly, we also export to Europe and Asia resulting in almost 50% of our annual revenue. Additional tariffs on the components and raw materials we are importing will increase our costs and increase the likelihood of retaliatory tariffs on our exported products adding additional headwinds against our small business.

I want to be optimistic that the new tariffs will be lifted soon and allow our company, and our dream, to continue to flourish. But being realistic, I am very concerned about the negative impacts of a trade war and our ability to continue to support our employees and our community.”

— **Tim Frey**, president and CEO, *MRP Bike*, Grand Junction, Colorado

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“Tariffs are going to affect the price of beer. It's also going to affect the long-term stability of a lot of these businesses. A lot of your favorite local breweries are going to be feeling that pain.”

— **Matt McMahon**, owner, Eleventh Hour Brewing Company, Pittsburgh, to [CBS News](#)

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"I'm a smaller business, and I'm not really staffed, equipped, and knowledgeable enough to know how to navigate tariffs. It is very hard to have that level of uncertainty. Are the tariffs going to be in play, or are they not?"

— **Bryan Szeliga**, owner, Fishtown Seafood, Haddonfield, New Jersey, to the [Associated Press](#)

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## Weighing the Cost of Staying Open

"I'm afraid we'll have to close our doors because people won't have the money to come and shop for things like piñatas and all the traditional Mexican candy that people love.”

— **Yesi Noyola**, owner, *Kandy Queen Dulceria*, North Richland Hills, Texas, to [CBS Texas](#)

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“People can’t pay more for stuff, and won’t pay more for items. ... Your items shrink to the point where you’re really going to evaluate if you’ll keep certain shops open.”

— **Sarah Pitkin**, owner of four hardware stores in Virginia, to the [New York Times](#)

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“I’d have to double my prices and that would put me out of business.”

— **Annie Bassin**, founder, *Annie’s Ginger Elixir*, Brooklyn, New York, to [The City](#)

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“It’s going to be harder for us to stay open.”

— Jennifer Zimmerman, owner, No Gluten Needed, Bohemia, New York, to the New York Times

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“If I get hit with those tariffs mid-year, it’s going to be an absolute killer on the business.”

— **Dana Chadwell**, owner, *Chattanooga Yarn Co.*, Chattanooga, Tennessee, to [Local 3 News](#)

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## Cost to Consumers

“Is this going to affect our business? You bet it is. I don’t like what’s going on. And I think people are going to be truly shocked at the pricing they’re going to see on the cars, on the lumber, on the clothes, on the food. This is going to be a mess.”

— **Linda Schlesinger-Wagner**, owner, *skinnytees*, Birmingham, Michigan, to the [Associated Press](#)

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“Our customers’ products are in your everyday lives. We’ve made it abundantly



# clear. If tariffs are increased or added, we cannot absorb them.”

— Jim Derry, CEO, Field Fastener, Rockford, Illinois, to Bloomberg

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“The recent increase in tariffs on imported goods will have a significant negative impact on my business. Many of the products I sell are imported, higher tariffs will directly raise my costs.

These increased costs will force me to either raise prices, which may drive away customers, or absorb the costs, which will threaten the sustainability of my business. Many of my customers are from immigrant communities who rely on these products as part of their cultural and dietary traditions, and price increases may make essential goods unaffordable for them.

I urge policymakers to consider the real-world consequences of these tariffs on small businesses like mine and the diverse communities that depend on them.”

— **Bridget Ofor**, owner, *Nana African Market*, Aurora, Colorado

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"I've already received numerous letters about how prices are going to go up. I can't absorb all of it."

— **Jim Arpe**, owner, *Learning Express Toys & Gifts*, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, to [KXTV](#)

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“Unfortunately, we would have to pass on to our customer in order to continue providing a handmade product. We do our best to minimize our price increases to the customer, but ... if we want to stay in business and we want to continue to be able to produce this item, you have to [raise prices].”

— **Misty Skolnick**, co-owner, *Uncle Jerry's Pretzels*, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to the [Pennsylvania Independent](#)

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“As a small business, every penny, every dollar counts, and we don't want to raise costs for our customers. We want them to keep coming back to us. We like the relationships we've developed, and we pride ourselves on not going above and beyond the price.”



— **Amanda Carson**, co-owner, *The British Shoppe*, Nashville, to [WSMV](#)

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“The tariffs would have a very negative effect on me. Actually, for the psyche of the consumer, even if they can afford it, they could be more hesitant to go out and spend money in the first place now.”

— **Leonard Simon**, owner, *Wright & Simon*, Wilmington, Delaware, to the [Delaware Business Times](#)

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## Impact on Americans

While the U.S. Chamber shares concerns about issues including border security, the scourge of fentanyl, and unfair trading practices around the globe, tariffs won't solve those problems and instead would lead to higher prices for Americans.

"The bottom line is this: tariffs are a tax paid by Americans, and their broad and indiscriminate use would stifle growth at the worst possible time," Chamber President and CEO Suzanne P. Clark said in her annual [State of American Business](#) address. She stressed that to boost economic growth, America must participate in the global economy. That includes seizing opportunities to increase trade.

In 2024, the Chamber unveiled the [Growth and Opportunity Imperative for America](#), an initiative to urge policymakers to focus on a goal of 3% annual real economic growth, which will raise wages for workers and create new opportunities for Americans to reach their dreams.

## More about Our Work

### CNBC Interview: Tariffs Are a Tax

[Tariffs are a tax on businesses and consumers, says U.S. Chamber of Commerce VP Neil Bradley](#)

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### Statement on Tariffs: April 2, 2025

[U.S. Chamber: Instead of Tariffs, It's Time to Accelerate Pro-Growth Agenda](#)

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### **Statement on Tariffs: March 3, 2025**

[U.S. Chamber Urges Swift End to Tariffs Set to Go into Effect; Highlights Real Harm to American Businesses, Workers, and Consumers](#)

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### **Statement on Tariffs: Feb 3, 2025**

[U.S. Chamber Welcomes Pause, Calls for Permanent End to Tariff Threats](#)

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### **Statement on Tariffs: Feb. 1, 2025**

[U.S. Chamber: Tariffs Are Not the Answer](#)

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### **CNBC Interview: Trade Should Be a Broader Agenda Item**

[We want trade to be a broader agenda item, says U.S. Chamber of Commerce CEO Suzanne Clark](#)

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