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# Big shadows, including Lighthizer's, loom over Greer nomination

Protectionist forces in Washington are taking the nomination of Jamieson Greer as a sign Donald Trump could follow through with his most aggressive trade proposals.

BY: **DOUG PALMER, ARI HAWKINS** | 11/27/2024 04:44 PM EST



Robert Lighthizer (left), seen here with Peter Navarro, skillfully outmaneuvered other Cabinet officials during President-elect Donald Trump's first term. | Mandel Ngan/AFP via Getty Images

Trade hawks are hailing Donald Trump's selection for U.S. trade representative as a sign the president-elect will continue the aggressive pro-tariff policies of his first term — even if the chief architect of those policies isn't in the administration.

Trump announced Tuesday night he will nominate Jamieson Greer, a trade attorney who served as USTR chief of staff in Trump's first term, to lead the trade office. Greer is a

protégé of Robert Lighthizer, who was Trump's trade representative in his first administration, engineering a historic shift in U.S. economic policy towards the rest of the world.

Greer is expected to broadly champion the policies his former boss embraced during Trump's first administration, and protectionists say the announcement is a sign of Lighthizer's lingering influence over Trump's agenda. But Trump has passed over Lighthizer for top economic roles, such as Commerce or Treasury secretary, and has yet to name him to any formal post in his incoming administration. That's raising questions about his future clout, as well as whether Greer will be able to navigate the infighting expected to ensue over the use of tariffs and other disruptive trade measures, if he's on his own.

Now a partner at King & Spalding, Greer has worked with Lighthizer to [craft trade and economic plans for the president-elect's first 100 days of his second term](#). And he has recommended Congress consider a number of tough actions on Beijing like revoking China's permanent normal trade relations status. That's a perspective also backed by Lighthizer, who as USTR, worked with Greer for the most substantial trade actions during Trump's first administration.

"Jamieson is a workhorse. He's not a show horse," said Aaron Cummings, who attended law school with Greer at the University of Virginia and is now co-chair of the Government Affairs Group at the Crowell & Moring law firm in D.C.

"Some people have sort of hoped that President Trump might be convinced to moderate his views. But I think the appointment of Jamieson is a sign that, no, the campaign rhetoric that Trump used on the [trail] is serious and needs to be taken seriously," Cummings said.

The choice of Lighthizer's protégé is helping fend off concerns from the most hardcore supporters of Trump's trade proposals that his decision to embrace seasoned Wall Street

financiers for other Cabinet roles could compel the president-elect to back off his most ambitious portions of his trade agenda, like a universal tariff.

The Coalition for a Prosperous America, a group that represents manufacturers who favor import protection and support Trump's tough approach on trade, hailed the nomination.

"I don't think that there's much daylight at all between the two of them on policy. Jamieson is exceptionally well-qualified," said Nick Iacovella, senior vice president for public affairs and communications for CPA. He said Greer was "deeply involved in every major trade policy implementation that took place during the Trump administration. That alone is notable, and I think forecasts the type of USTR that he's going to be."

Protectionist forces on both sides of the aisle have repeatedly pushed for the return of Lighthizer, whom they have praised for reshaping the bipartisan approach to adversarial countries such as China, and instinct to push stiff tariffs in an effort to protect U.S. industry. They anticipate Greer will follow a similar approach.

Trump signaled the same in his [statement announcing Greer](#) as his USTR nominee, noting he worked "under the former USTR Bob Lighthizer, a spectacular leader and person," who helped reverse "decades of disastrous Trade policies."

Lighthizer is likely to remain a valuable adviser to Trump on trade matters, "whether or not he has a formal job in the administration," said Myron Brilliant, a senior counselor at the advisory firm DGA-Albright Stonebridge Group and former top official at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

"Expect Greer to go hard on China, and generally implement Trump's tariff agenda," Brilliant added. "But the hope is that he will be a moderating voice and use the tariff threat to negotiate better deals with our other major trading partners like the EU, Canada and Mexico in areas like digital trade."

Some business groups that favor a free trade approach also welcomed Greer's nomination, even though they are wary of Trump's promises to aggressively pursue tariffs. They hope Greer can redirect the president-elect's protectionist instincts into the pursuit of new agreements to tear down barriers to U.S. goods and services exports. That aspect was largely absent from the Biden administration's trade agenda over the past four years.

"He is a seasoned trade expert and consummate professional who will bring new energy" to USTR," Jake Colvin, president of the National Foreign Trade Council said in a statement. "We look forward to working with Jamieson on our shared priorities of

strengthening the global competitiveness of U.S. companies, creating new export opportunities and opening markets around the world.”

Sen. [Mike Crapo](#) (R-Idaho), who is expected to become chair of the Senate Finance Committee next year, expressed the same hope. “After years of inaction, the USTR now has the opportunity to negotiate real trade agreements and enforce America’s rights under existing agreements,” Crapo said.

During Trump’s first term, Lighthizer — with Greer as his chief of staff — skillfully outmaneuvered other Cabinet officials, especially then-Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, to become the administration’s leading voice on trade.

That’s the traditional role of USTR. But Trump confused the issue early in his first administration by declaring Ross would take on that responsibility.

Eight years later, Trump has created the same situation by announcing that his nominee to be Commerce secretary, Howard Lutnick, “will lead our Tariff and Trade agenda, with additional direct responsibility for the Office of the United States Trade Representative.”

In addition, Trump’s transition press has declined to clarify whether Trump intends to keep USTR as a Cabinet-level agency. “At this time we won't be offering a statement on USTR, Commerce, and cabinet positions” a transition spokesperson said.

USTR traditionally holds Cabinet rank, giving its lead a seat at the table in Cabinet meetings where the president gets advice from their top officials. A demotion would put Greer at a disadvantage — especially if Lighthizer only serves as an informal outside adviser to Trump and does not have an official job within the administration.

But like Lighthizer before him, Greer knows U.S. trade law inside and out, and is well known within the trade community and on Capitol Hill. While Lutnick is a longtime friend of Trump and the billionaire head of a Wall Street financial firm, he is a novice when it comes to working the levers of power within Washington. That could give Greer an edge in battles over trade and tariff policy within the administration.

“Selecting Greer as USTR nominee is a great choice,” said Wendy Cutler, a former senior U.S. trade negotiator who is now vice president at the Asia Society Policy Institute. “He’s well-versed on U.S. trade law, has had hands-on experience in trade negotiations with China and other partners during the first Trump term, has deep experience working with Congress, and has learned from the best, Ambassador Lighthizer.”

Mike Wessel, a veteran Democratic trade strategist and member of USTR’s Labor Advisory Committee and the hawkish U.S.-China Economic & Security Review Commission, was also lavish in his praise of Greer. “He is knowledgeable, unflappable and is a seasoned trade expert,” Wessel said.

With Republicans firmly in control of the Senate, Greer is likely to face a smooth confirmation process and easy approval. But given Trump's trade ambitions and the heavyweight team of rivals he has assembled, Greer's coming years could be marked by battles both abroad and within the administration.

And if he's forgotten, he could refresh his memory of what to expect by rereading his old boss' book, "No Trade is Free," where Lighthizer recounted his expectations when he accepted the job.

"I knew what I was signing up for. I was facing four years of eighteen hour days and seven-day weeks," Lighthizer wrote. "Along with my team, I'd be fighting big business. I'd be fighting globalists and nationalists of all stripes from China, Mexico, Canada and Europe, whose interests diverged from those of American workers."



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