America’s First Billionaire President

Who would have predicted America’s first billionaire president would go down in history as the greatest man ever to serve in the office, a man whose character the office would shape, pushing him to greater depths of integrity and propelling him to greater heights of success than he had ever known, a man who, despite never having been previously elected to office, would transform America’s government with new management techniques borrowed from the world of business; a man who, despite being eviscerated in the press and vituperated by his foes, would come to be known as first in the hearts of his countrymen?

In fact, George Washington was, arguably, America’s first billionaire president.

Washington was more than just a general. He was the richest man in America, an agrobusiness entrepreneur who held more acreage than anyone in the country.

Nevertheless, Washington was not a particularly successful farmer and did not gain his great wealth by profits earned in the market. Rather, he acquired his enormous fortune, like John Kerry, by marriage and by “the art of the deal,” persuading Congress to reward his military service with vast land grants.

In today’s context, Washington would probably have been disqualified in the eyes of the press because of his bargaining with Congress for personal gain.

Furthermore, his constant court battles against squatters on his Ohio lands represented a clear conflict of interest that would have rendered him ineligible to serve without putting his fortune into a blind trust.

Our founders had enough wisdom to realize that business leaders and the wealthy should neither be disqualified for public service nor required to surrender their business holdings upon election to office. American law still recognizes the president should not labor under such an encumbrance, as it exempts the chief executive from prosecution for conflicting interests. Axiomatically, no one who is in charge of everything can avoid conflicts of interest.

America should accept Donald Trump’s plan to put the operational control of his businesses in the hands of his daughter and sons so he can focus on making America prosper. If a rising tide lifts all boats, there is no reason his own considerable ship should not rise with the other vessels. Obviously, like Washington, he will be subject to criticism from the press and his political foes. Every move made by his children will face public scrutiny, and they should not enjoy any degree of immunity from prosecution for any laws they may break.

Perhaps no business in history will ever face such microscopic inspection, and after the apparent impunity enjoyed by high-profile members of the current administration, the nation should find relief in seeing the press finally hold government leaders and their associates accountable.

The gotcha gang may well find some basis for accusation before the next four years comes and goes, and we will deal with it if they do. That truth should provide sufficient consolation for those who press the president-elect and his family to divest their holdings, and it should inspire the Trump family to walk a tight, bright line of integrity and legality.

Since they are willing to submit to such scrutiny, America should, in the now-cliché words of Ronald Reagan, “trust, but verify.” If everything goes right, Trump could earn further comparison to Washington. If things go wrong, his enemies will have the last laugh. {eoa}

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