

Trump's sweeping tariffs present challenges and opportunities to aviation businesses

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From

By

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Transcript

The Trump administration's sweeping tariffs are reshaping the aviation industry. It means challenges and opportunities for businesses in Wichita, Kansas, often called the air capital of the world.

LEILA FADEL, HOST:

President Trump's trade war is reshaping the world's aviation industry, which had a zero-tariff agreement for more than four decades. KMUW's Rose Conlon reports on how that's playing out in a city known as the air capital of the world.

(SOUNDBITE OF MACHINERY WHIRRING)

ROSE CONLON, BYLINE: Etezazi Industries in Wichita, Kansas, makes airplane parts. A machinist, Jayden McKay (ph), is installing bearings on a part for the engine pylon of a single-aisle passenger plane.

JAYDEN MCKAY: What it does is it starts flat when you put it in with this, and that's what swells it into the hole so it doesn't fall out.

CONLON: Etezazi's customers include planemakers Boeing and Airbus, among others. And here, steel and aluminum are king. Both materials now carry a 50% tariff when imported from abroad, which cuts into CEO Amir Etezazi's bottom line.

AMIR ETEZAZI: We have noticed some increase in a lot of costs. We don't know if some of that are due to some of the inflation or it's due to some of the tariffs.

CONLON: Etezazi does a lot of business with Canada and Mexico, and he says some customers from those countries have pulled back on orders due to reciprocal tariffs initiated by President Trump. Still, Etezazi also sees new opportunities. Some U.S. customers have started asking him for parts they might have bought from overseas suppliers before tariffs. The catch? These new customers say his prices here in the U.S. are a lot higher than what they were accustomed to paying.

ETEZAZI: Somewhere between 10- to 15% all the way up to 50s, in some cases, a hundred percent. We're coming to the conclusion that some of that is coming from outside the U.S.

CONLON: He's trying to get creative on cost-cutting strategies, like leaning on automation to increase efficiency, and he's hiring more workers to help meet demand. New opportunities for companies like Etezazi are part of what Trump says is the goal of his tariffs. But those tariffs also make it a lot more expensive for other countries to buy American-made planes, says Usha Haley. She's a professor at the Barton School of Business at Wichita State University.

USHA HALEY: Countries are getting pretty fed up, and so they're looking for alternative suppliers. The major alternative currently is Airbus, but there will be others.

CONLON: That isn't great for American airplane manufacturers or states like Kansas, where the aviation industry is one of the largest employers.

HALEY: I know of some employers that have rescinded their offers because they don't know how many people they can hire or how many planes they're going to be manufacturing in the future.

CONLON: On top of existing tariffs, planemakers are awaiting results from a Commerce Department investigation into potential national security risks associated with imported airplane parts. Trump administration officials have indicated the results could lead to even higher industry-specific tariffs. Ed Bolen is president of the National Business Aviation Association, which lobbies for general aviation companies.

ED BOLEN: I think there's a lot of concern being expressed, and I think that there's a degree of frustration.

CONLON: Bolen says tariffs risk stifling investment and innovation in the U.S.

BOLEN: Flat, fair, free trade environments work very well for the U.S. aerospace industry, and we have concerns that that could be upset.

(SOUNDBITE OF MACHINERY WHIRRING)

CONLON: An upset that's at times inconvenient but not entirely unwelcome for some Kansas businesses like Etezazi, so long as the newfound demand holds steady.

For NPR News, I'm Rose Conlon in Wichita, Kansas.

(SOUNDBITE OF B.O.B AND HAYLEY WILLIAMS SONG, "AIRPLANES")

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