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Lou Barletta talks immigration, infrastructure and U.S. Senate campaign with LNP



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer May 11, 2018



Congressman Lou Barletta who is a candidate for the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate talks to LNP's Sam Pennsylvania May 10, 2018.

BLAINE SHAHAN | Staff Photographer

U.S. Rep. Lou Barletta, one of President Donald Trump's loudest and earliest supporters in the 2016 campaign, doesn't find much to dislike about the White House these days.

He's on board with Trump's negotiation of trade deals, his engagement with North Korea and the tearing-up of the Barack Obama-era Iran nuclear deal.

On immigration, the issue Barletta is widely known to have hard-line stances on, he thinks Trump can make a difference.

And Barletta wants to help — not from his seat in Congress, but in the U.S. Senate.

He's running in Tuesday's Republican primary against state Rep. Jim Christiana, of Beaver County. The winner will go on to face two-term Democratic U.S. Sen. Bob Casey.

Barletta sat down with LNP on Thursday before a fundraiser with the Republican Committee of Lancaster County in Manheim Township.

Immigration and DACA

Barletta rose to national prominence as the mayor of Hazleton, where he cracked down on businesses that employed and landlords that housed undocumented immigrants.

He said securing the border — through biometric recognition technology, physical barriers and preventing immigrants from overstaying short-term visas — should come first.

Only then should lawmakers discuss a solution for the program protecting young undocumented immigrants who came to the country as minors, Barletta said. Those immigrants, recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program, should “be treated with compassion,” though he did not say whether he would support them being allowed to stay in the country.

“When people say standing up against illegal immigration is anti-immigrant, they're totally wrong. In fact it's the opposite,” he said. “I'm probably the most pro-immigrant voice in the country because I want to protect and help the legal immigrants who come into the country.”

Transportation and infrastructure

As a chairman of one of the transportation and infrastructure subcommittees, Barletta was in consideration last year for Transportation secretary and he said he still has regular contact with the White House about it.

Trump's promised \$1 trillion infrastructure deal has stalled, and Barletta says he doesn't think it will happen “until Congress has the courage to stand up and put the money toward infrastructure.”

He didn't say exactly where that money should come from. But he said he believes a user fee, such as drivers paying based on how much they use roads, is a fair option.

Tariffs and trade war

Barletta is fully behind Trump in his war of words with China about tariffs and trade deficits.

“There's not going to be any trade war,” Barletta said. “We have the best negotiator we have ever had negotiating for American workers.”

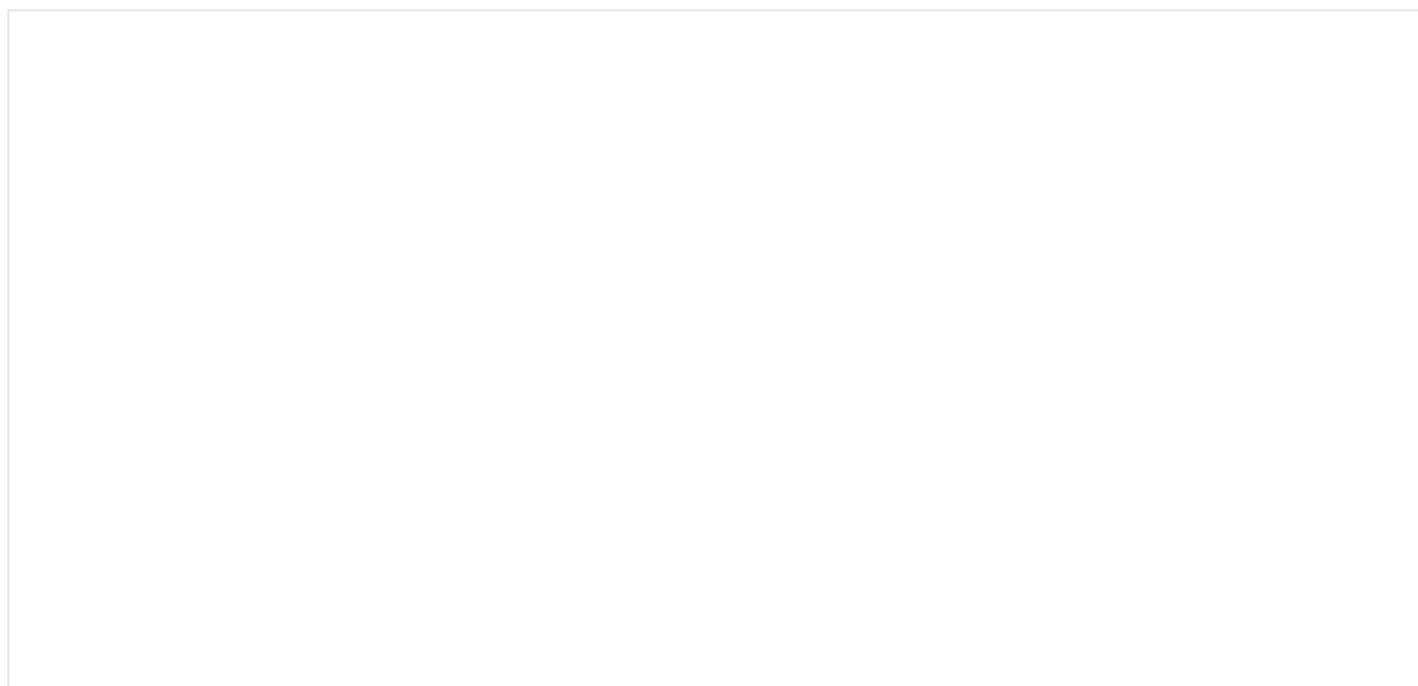
Trump is using the steel and aluminum tariffs as leverage, Barletta said. And even if retaliatory tariffs negatively affect other sectors like the agriculture industry, Trump will find another way to help them, Barletta said.

After-school programs

One of the few disagreements between Barletta and Trump was when the president proposed to zero-out funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers that provide for after-school programs.

Barletta had seen how one of the programs, SHINE, had increased participation and graduation rates in his district, so he said he “single-handedly fought to get that money returned back into the budget.”

He said he hopes to bring Education Secretary Betsy DeVos to Pennsylvania to see the program firsthand.





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