

# Senator Cory Booker Provides Insights for Small Business Owners

**PAYCHEX**  
Business  
Series

Coronavirus



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**Cory Booker**

U.S. Senator of New Jersey

## Full transcript

### **Gene Marks:**

Hey, everybody. Welcome to the Paychex Business Series podcast. My name is Gene Marks and today I'm going to be talking with Senator Cory Booker. Senator Booker is a Senator from the state of New Jersey and sits on the Senate Small Business Committee. We're going to be talking about a lot of things that impact your small business, such as his thoughts on the minimum wage, the stimulus, and some areas where both Republicans and Democrats can agree on for some potential legislation in 2021 and 2022. So stay tuned for this conversation and by the way, join us soon for another conversation I'm going to be having with House Representative Blaine Luetkemeyer, Senator, sorry, Congressman Luetkemeyer is on the ranking member of the House's Small Business Committee, and we'll be talking with him on similar topics. But for now, Senator Booker, thanks so much for joining me. I'm glad that you are here to speak and I have so many questions for you, but a very short timeframe. So I'm going to jump right into it if that's okay with you.

### **Cory Booker:**

That's fine.

### **Gene Marks:**

All right. So first of all, listen our audience are small business owners, the people that are listening to this podcast and my readers are people that are running businesses of all different sizes. So we're heading into this new, obviously this new administration, stimulus bill is coming out. There are some certain things in this stimulus bill that are going to have some big impacts on small businesses. And this isn't a debate, I just want to hear your point of view on what some of these issues are so some of our listeners can walk away and consider that point of view. One of the things that President Biden wants to have as part of his stimulus proposal is to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour nationally. So Senator Booker, please give me your thoughts on the minimum wage. Do you think this is a good thing for small businesses and what are your thoughts on it?

**Cory Booker:**

Sure. I basically look at the evidence and I've seen cities around this country move towards a \$15 minimum wage, lots of predictions for doom and gloom, but we see on the whole that not only has there not been a real significant economic hit to small businesses, but actually in places, like I remember reading some of the studies that were done on Seattle, one of the early movers, is they actually saw a boom to small businesses as more of the people who are earning those minimum wages were able to spend a lot more into the economy. So I think on the whole, this is a very good thing to do and to do it on a, not all at once, but to do it on a pace that gets the minimum wage up as if it from the very beginning was something pegged to inflation. Remember, minimum wage started a lot higher than it is right now, back in the 1960s, it just never kept up with inflation. And you have this distraught present, which you didn't have around the time my dad was getting into the workforce where a family working full-time jobs has your family below the poverty line. And that is just unfortunate.

**Gene Marks:**

So, and just one follow up on that. I mean, listen, you serve New Jersey, I live in Philadelphia and obviously we live in a similar area. Our cost of living is less than it is than DC or New York, certainly less than San Francisco or Seattle, where there already is a \$15 an hour minimum wage. And we all know that small businesses are struggling right now trying to navigate their way through this pandemic. So do you think this is the right time to impose that kind of an additional cost on them? Or do you think that is, well do you think is the right time to do this?

**Cory Booker:**

Well, look, I think we have a small business crisis in our country. New business starts have been going down for years now, and we know that small businesses are the backbone for job creation in America. We need to get more policy that supports entrepreneurs and small business people. It's why I have with Senator Daines, a Republican, a bipartisan bill to really meet this crisis for small businesses, especially those with 50 and less employees.

**Cory Booker:**

We know just any study of sort of the economics of it that helping to sustain businesses through this crisis is far more economical for our overall economy frankly, far more efficient to our overall economy than to let businesses fail and then try to rebuild businesses afterwards. And so we have to do a lot to incentivize people to risk their capital. We need to be looking at targeting our tax system, not just to large corporations, who trust me, I see the kind of tax breaks they fight for with armies of lobbyists down here, I'm much more of the opinion that we should be doing a lot more to help our different types of small businesses, whether they be pass throughs or what have you, because right now our country needs to get back to an entrepreneurial culture.

**Cory Booker:**

So look, as far as labor costs, which are extraordinary for many small businesses, a large part of the challenge is the cost of labor. We have a nation right now where, and again, I live in a low, in fact I'm the only Senator or one of the only Senators that lives in the low income neighborhood, where I'm astonished, I see people in my community working longer hours than my parents did, and my parents were two IBM executives who worked long hours, who cannot afford to meet their minimum basic needs for their families. That should not be in our country.

**Cory Booker:**

And we need to have a commitment to a wage floor, but we should find other ways, especially for small businesses, to help them meet the challenges of being an entrepreneur in America, from the red tape and challenges, we have all the way to just affording healthcare when you're starting a business, which is often the job lock that keeps people from doing it. We need to have a much more entrepreneurial vision for our country. And I know that the Biden administration has been open to a lot of these conversations about how we can get business accelerators, business incubators, other things up to help small businesses in our country.

**Gene Marks:**

You bring up a good point about low- to moderate-income areas. I mean, obviously one of my biggest frustrations in the last stimulus rounds was that not enough business owners in these low- to moderate-income areas were getting the funding that they needed. And now in the new stimulus bill, there's billions put aside through community banks and CDFIs and others to provide that needed help for again, businesses in those low- to moderate-income areas. So Senator Booker, do you think that will be enough? And I just personally, some of my frustrations about business owners in those areas is that they're either not aware of some of these things or they don't take the initiative to go after them, these benefits themselves. I mean, have you found that to be true and what more can be done to help out those businesses located in those areas?

**Cory Booker:**

Well, so two things. One is I had with Senator Warner, we worked really hard to get the expansion of resources to CDFIs and MDIs and places that could really be accessible to more businesses. Remember, we are a nation where many of our small businesses do not have the kind of banking relationships that can allow them to easily, like other firms I know in New Jersey that were able to go work with their accountant to get PPP loans, I had some businesses come tell me that they didn't even need them, but they had such sophisticated accountants come to them and try to push them on taking this because it was quote unquote, easy money. Then you go to businesses, especially disproportion Latino and African-American entrepreneurs, just don't have banking relationships and made it very harder. So it wasn't that they weren't savvy enough to go after them. I had lots of people coming to my office saying that they couldn't even find major banks that would service their PPP loans because they didn't have business with those banks.

**Cory Booker:**

And so that's why we worked really hard to design this last stimulus package to make more money available to those local or more accessible financial institutions. And it's a reason why I went to work with Senator Daines in our bill, which we hope to get included in this next package, which would actually go to local communities that set up financial platforms that are much more easily accessible, like we have in New Jersey through the state of New Jersey itself has mechanisms with which people could access a grant money. And so these were already existing institutions are easier to access for small businesses that don't have those kinds of banking relationships. And so we just have to be thoughtful.

**Cory Booker:**

The reality is, is we are an entrepreneurial nation. I have not met a small business person who isn't working harder than they ever thought they'd have to work to try to make their business flow and that's from small restaurateurs, all the way to people who've started businesses online. And we just have to make sure that we are doing things to help them and not just crafting these programs that only the bigger companies can access.

**Gene Marks:**

Makes sense. Makes sense. You talked about the bill that you are proposing. Do you expect that to be part of the overall stimulus bill or do you think it's something that could be stand alone, only because I know there is bipartisan agreements for doing things like you're proposing to help small businesses and they don't get in the way of the political debates over increasing unemployment or aids to states and things like that. So do you think it will be a standalone kind of thing, or do you think it'll have to be rolled into an overall stimulus spending bill?

**Cory Booker:**

Look, real quick, I worked really hard to get on the small business committee because I knew that I would find bipartisan senators there. As far as the vehicle, frankly, me and my Republican allies on this, in this bill or just whatever the quickest way to get it done is because we know there are so many businesses on the brink and that are struggling. So I actually think it might be quicker just to get it wrapped into one of these larger bills that's moving anyway, than trying to get scheduled floor time in the Senate to get a vote on it.

**Gene Marks:**

Okay. I know we only have about five minutes. So a couple other things just looking forward in the future, Senator Booker. I mean, obviously we all know about the partisanship that goes on in Washington, where do you see some potential bipartisan agreement on things that could benefit small businesses, at least in the next two years before midterms, in the way of infrastructure, healthcare, any type of 401(k) changes, things that you think that if you're a small business owner you can have a probability of seeing from Congress because there can be some bipartisan agreement?

**Cory Booker:**

Look, I think that the first thing is dealing with this vaccine. If you have a business that's been closed or affected, we need to get this vaccine out. I was happy with the recent decisions by the Biden administration to push more vaccine out the door. I'm excited about the resources that we want to put into this COVID package to empower more states to be able to get vaccines injected into people. And we can't heal the economy until we heal this pandemic. So that's one big thing that should be a bipartisan, common cause effort to get out of this level of death and sickness that we have.

**Cory Booker:**

Number two is there is a serious need for infrastructure investments, which would be a job creator. We know every dollar invested in infrastructure in this community, in this country produces more than a hundred percent return. In some areas of the country you can get up to three and four dollars back over time on your dollar investment. The cost of capital is so cheap right now. This is the time we should be building out infrastructure and that's everything from broadband to roads and bridges. And there is generally a lot of bipartisan conversation around this. I'm hoping that we can actually get that done.

**Cory Booker:**

I do think that there's other things that affect businesses that we often don't think of that are really, really important, like education. We know if we can have a different vision for community colleges, including apprenticeship programs, we can get a lot done. We know from this pandemic also that we have a lot of national security issues because from PPP to penicillin, we don't make the stuff here anymore, which makes us very vulnerable, especially to global adversaries like China. And so to start a domestic manufacturing to onshore businesses and make a real investment, like we've done in past generations, into American manufacturing could help not only start up businesses, but a lot of business to business relationships would help to fuel that. I see bipartisanship around that as well.

**Cory Booker:**

And so I've been hunting since I've been down here and from opportunity zones, which is my bill with Tim Scott, all the way to criminal justice reform, which was my bill with Dick Durbin and Lindsey Graham and others, I'm seeking out places where we could find one accord and actually get things done, deliver things that will make a difference. And I'm very hopeful right now with a president that is not falling into the trap of just vilifying Republicans, but really looking for common ground, that we might be able to see some real wins for America in the coming two years.

**Gene Marks:**

That's great. And we have one minute to go, and I'll just final words from you, based on all the conversations you've had with your constituents and your time on the Senate Small Business Committee, what do you think are some of the biggest lessons that small businesses are going to take away from this whole experience of 2020 that they can learn for the future?

**Cory Booker:**

Well, I think we're all more interconnected than we realize and politics can hurt us if we all don't mind them. I don't care what side of the aisle you are on, when you don't take a pandemic seriously, when you use it for political opportunism, everybody gets hurt. We are the best in America when we find common ground, when a generation is committed to putting more indivisible into the one nation under God, we're all on the same team. And right now other nations are trying to out America us. We used to have the best infrastructure on the planet Earth, we're no longer in the top 10. The best education system on the planet Earth, we're no longer in the top 10, not even of college graduates per capita, where we used to be the number one. We used to be the most R&D intensive economy, research and development intensive economy on the planet Earth, other people are trying to out innovate us by investing more in innovation and research.

**Cory Booker:**

They're trying to do us better than us. And the only thing preventing us from doing us really well is remembering that we are in us, that we are one nation with one destiny. And so everybody has got to play that. We can't have more animosity for each other than we do those people that are trying to clean our clock around the planet. We are Americans, we are the United States of America, and more than ever, we need a revival of civic grace. We need to see within each other a brotherhood and sisterhood. And that has got to be more of a theme. If our public was like that, it would help our politics be more like that. And I just know when, I love dealing with business people, because business often demands a centrality of focus on getting everybody moving in the same direction so that we can thrive as an economy and as a country.

**Gene Marks:**

Why do I get the feeling that you have given this speech before? Well said. Thank you. Senator Booker.

**Cory Booker:**

The book I wrote is called "United", so it's been what I've been planning.

**Gene Marks:**

Yep. It's definitely part of the script. Hey, listen, thank you very much for your time. I'm a fan. I enjoyed the conversation. And Senator Booker, thanks again.

**Cory Booker:**

Thank you. Take care now.

**Gene Marks:**

Senator Cory Booker is a Senator from the state of New Jersey and sits on the Senate Small Business Committee. Thank you, Senator Booker for joining me. Your insights were very valuable and I think impactful for a lot of us that are trying to figure out what's going to happen in Washington over the next couple of years.

**Gene Marks:**

Also, I will be interviewing shortly Representative Blaine Luetkemeyer. Representative Luetkemeyer, Congressman Luetkemeyer is the ranking member of the House's Small Business Committee. We're going to be talking about similar issues I spoke about with Senator Booker, such as minimum wage and the stimulus, deficits and things that are going to impact your small business. So keep an eye out for that interview. That podcast will be coming up very soon.

**Gene Marks:**

Thank you very much for joining us. And if you'd like more information to help you run your business and advice on running your business, please visit us at [paychex.com/worx](https://paychex.com/worx). That's W-O-R-X. My name is Gene Marks and we'll see you again soon.

**Speaker 3:**

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