

**ALERT**

## St. Louis businesses brace for Trump tariffs. Expect prices to rise, they say.

**Hannah Wyman**

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Jake Bonura, right, assists customers Stephanie Balsman and her daughter Taylor Herwig, both from Imperial, as they shop for kitchen appliances for Herwig's new home on Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025, at Authorized Appliance in Maryland Heights. Businesses including Authorized Appliance are concerned about whether or how President Donald Trump's promised tariffs on foreign imports will cost them to stock inventory.

Laurie Skrivan photos, Post-Dispatch

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**ST. LOUIS** — Retailers and consumers from across the region are steeling themselves for higher costs and disrupted supply chains in anticipation of tariffs long promised by President Donald Trump on the campaign trail.

From an appliance retailer in Maryland Heights to a global footwear manufacturer to an international foods store on South Grand Boulevard, businesses here say they are shifting their supply chains, boosting inventory and encouraging consumers to buy sooner rather than later.

Justin Breckle, CEO of Authorized Appliance in Maryland Heights, said the uncertainty has been the worst part of the wait. He expects prices will go up, as they did when Trump levied tariffs in 2018 on goods from China, Canada and Mexico.

“If you’re gonna put tariffs in place, what are they?” Breckle said. “How much? When’s it going to go into effect? And we can plan our business.”

During his campaign, Trump repeatedly said he would impose tariffs on products coming into the United States from Canada, Mexico and China. Most recently, he said he would impose a 25% tax on imports from Mexico and Canada, and an “additional 10%” levy on Chinese goods. He said tariffs would be a first-day priority — but then delayed them until Feb. 1.

Tariffs are often misunderstood by consumers who think foreign manufacturers take on the added expense of a tariff, said Peter Goger, an account executive at logistics company OEC Group in St Louis. In practice, U.S. companies pay the additional tax on the imported goods, which is often passed on to customers through higher prices.

“Whether it’s appliances or holiday gifts, people are trying to get those purchases in before things change,” Goger said.

Laura Wimmer and her husband have decided to do just that. They’re at the start of a \$30,000 kitchen remodel and opted to buy all the appliances at once to avoid potential tariffs.

Wimmer, a part-time special education teacher from Maplewood, said she follows the news closely. And when she researched how much prices could go up, she decided to act: She bought a new refrigerator, microwave, range hood and dishwasher from Manchester-based retailer Slyman Bros. Appliances.

Jeremy Meyer works to install a Gaggenau stove hood in a display room at Authorized Appliance in Maryland Heights on Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025.

Laurie Skrivan, Post-Dispatch

“The increases would be so significant, not something like 5%,” Wimmer said. “Instead of waiting until we could afford each, it made sense to go ahead and buy everything.”

The Wimmers took out a small short-term loan. Slyman Bros. will store some of the appliances until they can be installed.

“Even if I have to extend my warranty, we would still come out ahead,” Wimmer said. “I am so uncomfortable with what could be around the corner that if there’s something I know I can prepare now, it makes sense for me to do that now.”

## Diversifying suppliers, stockpiling

Haitao Li, chair of the supply chain and analytics department at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, said companies should be improving their supply chains by expanding their sourcing. Parts and components for things like big electrical machinery, vehicles, pharmaceuticals and computers could be taxed, in addition to finished goods.

At Jay’s International Foods on South Grand, company president Noy Liam said he is concerned. Most of his inventory is imported. Ten percent is from China, he said.

“We carry a lot of products around the world,” Liam said. “Of course, (tariffs) will probably have an effect. Of course prices will go up. How much? I’m not sure.”

But Jay's International Foods will survive, Liam said. Most of the products the grocer carries from Asia are "pretty much the same," Liam said, so products from China, like fresh garlic or basil, he can buy through Vietnam or Thailand.

"Hopefully tariffs on those two countries are minimal," he said.

Clayton-based shoe manufacturer Caleres has been working closely with factories to find new sourcing ahead of potential tariffs, leaders said.

"We expect to have about 70% sourced outside of China by the back half of 2025 and our lead brands are further along on this migration," Caleres chief financial officer Jack Calandra told investors during an earnings call last month. "We are working proactively to mitigate the risks of additional tariffs and believe our sourcing capabilities position us well to adapt to any changes."

But some retailers can't easily change the products they carry — especially when their customers expect to buy specific brands.

Authorized Appliance's Breckle said the business is at a crossroads. They don't want to stockpile inventory, in case demand drops, but the appliance manufacturers they buy from are most likely going to raise prices. The question is, by how much?

The first time Trump was in office, some manufacturers boosted prices, he said. This year, he's watching prices rise again — but perhaps just due to a rising cost of living, Breckle said.

Either way, Authorized Appliance is trying to plan ahead: It's about to launch an e-commerce website to target "duress shoppers," folks who are in need of a new appliance right away because their previous one broke. Consumers building a house or remodeling a kitchen are more able and more likely to hold off on big ticket items as prices go up, he said.

Authorized Appliance is going to be cautious until it knows more, Breckle said.

They're not going to hire a bunch of new salespeople now, he said.

"We're not going to spend a bunch of money to invest in our core business because we don't know whether that core business is going to go up, down or stay the same," Breckle said.

Customers of Slyman Bros. are "certainly talking about" tariffs, but it seems like most are waiting to see what will happen, said Mary Beth Marshall, head of marketing and merchandising manager.

"I think people are still trying to figure out what's going to happen," Marshall said. "Everything is still so new."

Slyman Bros. is business as usual for now, Marshall said. The retailer is in touch with its manufacturers, so it can react quickly when things change, she said.

"Thankfully we have a big warehouse where we can make big stocking orders," Marshall said.