

Who's best for business?

The nation's next president could help or hurt your company's bottom line

The final coat of polish is drying on the national agendas for presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain.

And Roger Caplan, a Howard County small business owner, says it will all come down to the man with the plan for an economic turnaround.

"It's the worst economy I've ever seen," said Caplan, president of the Caplan Group, a marketing and advertising business. "We are in need of a fundamental change."

But in a campaign muddled with policies on new taxes and tax cuts, universal

health care and energy reform, what will it mean for your business? Many business leaders say it's still unclear how the specifics of each plan could help or hinder their industries. "Businesses are trying to plan, but they aren't sure what direction things are headed," said Don Fry, president of the Greater Baltimore

Committee.

But others say they are starting to weigh the options.

Please see **ELECTION**, Page 30

From Page 25

Obama's plan could sting with more taxes for some businesses and for high-earners. But his proposed tax breaks for small businesses and low- to middle-income workers could create more jobs and could boost consumer spending.

In Maryland, where about 16 percent of the state's population are considered low-income earners, the approach could give local businesses an advantage, said Matthew Crenson, a political science professor at Johns Hopkins University.

McCain's tax plans are more business-friendly, but some question if his energy policy invests enough in renewables, which could lower energy costs and add high-paying technology jobs.

Both candidates also have vowed to lower health care costs and push to cover more uninsured residents, which account for about 800,000 Marylanders. The changes — if approved — could help small businesses be more competitive and maintain a skilled work force,

said Ellen Valentino, director of the National Federation of Independent Business in Maryland.

Others say regardless of the issues, it's the election that will ultimately boost their businesses.

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Tom Neubauer
Erickson Retirement
Communities

At Catonsville-based Erickson Retirement Communities, a sluggish economy and a faltering housing market have made it harder to get retirees into its newest communities. Tom Neubauer, Erickson's senior vice president of sales, said the company has reviewed both candidates' plans and hasn't made a decision about which one its executives would back. "The election is great for our business, because people are sensing there will be a change," Neubauer said.