

Gary Neville Criticises National Insurance Rise, Says Business Is Feeling the Strain

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Former England footballer Gary Neville has voiced concern over the government's recent increase in National Insurance (NI) for employers, warning it could discourage companies from hiring and place undue pressure on businesses already grappling with a fragile economy. Speaking in an interview with *Sky News Business Live*, Neville criticised the decision to raise employer contributions, calling it poorly timed and burdensome, especially for small firms.

Neville, who has become a prominent business figure since retiring from football, highlighted the impact of the rise, which sees employers now paying up to 13.8% in NI contributions on salaries above £9,100. The measure, introduced in April as part of the government's strategy to raise an additional £25 billion for the Treasury, has drawn criticism from some business owners who say it adds to existing financial pressures.

"I honestly don't believe that companies and small businesses should be deterred from employing people," Neville said. "The national insurance rise was one that I feel probably could have been held back, particularly in terms of how the economy was."

The government has defended the increase originally outlined by Chancellor Rachel Reeves in last year's Budget, arguing it is necessary to fund public services such as the National Health Service (NHS) and reduce waiting lists. However, the Bank of England has noted signs of a softening labour market, with Governor Andrew Bailey recently pointing out that employment growth has slowed and hiring intentions have weakened.

Neville acknowledged the government's move to raise the minimum wage, stating it was vital for workers to be "paid more and looked after." Yet he pointed out that the combination of higher wages and increased employer NI contributions at the same time created a "double whammy" for businesses.

With interests in property, hospitality, and media, Neville's business portfolio includes GG Hospitality, owner of Hotel Football and the Stock Exchange Hotel, as well as Relentless Developments and production firm Buzz 16. His comments reflect wider concerns among business owners that rising costs could hinder economic recovery and employment growth.

Shifting to football, Neville also gave his take on Manchester United's current form. Following the club's disappointing 15th-place finish last season, their worst in Premier League history, he suggested that significant squad improvements are needed. "They need a goalkeeper. If they fill those two positions with decent signings, then United can have a better season... it can't get any worse, really," he said.

Neville, known for his candid assessments both on and off the pitch, offered a stark comparison between the challenges facing the UK economy and those facing his former club, concluding that turning Manchester United around "could be a bigger challenge than the economy."