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Small businesses feel slighted in political rhetoric

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Small-business owners say the 2008 presidential candidates from both the Republican and Democratic parties are ignoring their issues.

A poll by American Management Services and Suffolk University shows that 66 percent cannot identify a single policy proposal targeted for the nation's 23 million small-business owners.

"The reality is that none of the current candidates have small businesses on their radar; they throw it out like some kind of pabulum," said George Cloutier, chairman of AMS, which offers services to help small and midsize businesses improve profits.

He said small-business owners as a group don't make a lot of political waves.

"You could argue that the candidates are so focused on the religious, ethnic, and social policy and civil rights groups that they are forgetting this whole huge voting bloc and ignoring it," Mr. Cloutier said. "Not that the other blocs shouldn't be addressed, but you can't ignore them."

The national poll of 400 small-business owners was conducted Oct. 17 to Oct. 30 and had a margin of error of five percentage points. Of the respondents, 31 percent identified themselves as Republicans, 27 percent as Democrats and 28 percent as independents.

Mr. Cloutier said he was surprised at that number because of a perception that small businesses were led largely by Republican, low-tax advocates.

The survey found that while corporate giants were riding high on Wall Street, 70 percent of small-business owners were not benefiting from the stock market boom.

About 56 percent of respondents said the high price of oil was the biggest factor cutting into their profits and keeping them from expanding their businesses.

"The economy is great for the big corporations and for Wall Street, but small businesses are not feeling the effects of a supposedly strong economy as Wall Street would have you believe," Mr. Cloutier said.

Almost 60 percent of those polled said the economy was moving in the wrong direction.

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On health care, 73 percent of respondents said the next president and Congress should implement a plan to help small-business owners pay for coverage for themselves and their employees.

About 72 percent opposed an idea that would grant amnesty to illegal aliens.

Mr. Cloutier said the most striking revelation from the poll was the disconnect between business owners and the federal government.

"Most of them want to know more about what the federal government can do for them," he said. "Only 9 percent have ever touched a government program, many of them have no idea how to get involved and others said they were just too complicated."