

NFIB Survey: Small-Business Owners View Illegal Immigration as Serious Problem

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—Released today, the results of the National Federation of Independent Business Research Foundation Member Survey on Immigration found that small-business owners see illegal immigration as a serious problem, but are divided on which solution will best address the issue.

More than 90 percent of NFIB small-business owners surveyed believe illegal immigration is a problem. Seventy percent rank it as a "very serious" or "serious" problem, and 86 percent say it should have a "very high" or "high" priority for Congress and the Bush administration.

According to the small-business owners surveyed, 47 percent said the single most important reason illegal immigration constitutes a problem is the cost of illegal immigrants to taxpayers. Other reasons receiving significant support were national security and threat of terrorism (23 percent), disrespect for the law (13 percent) and job loss/depressed wages for Americans (10 percent).

"Like most Americans, small-business owners are troubled by the problem of illegal immigration," said Dan Danner, executive vice president of NFIB. "As Congress debates this issue, it is important that they take into account how any legislation will affect small-business owners and the economy. A thoughtful and deliberate process is the best path for lawmakers as they consider this contentious issue."

NFIB small-business owners have a mixed view on amnesty for illegal immigrants. Nearly half say there should be no amnesty under any circumstances and half hold the opposite position. A sizeable majority (63 percent) oppose amnesty for illegal immigrants if they only need to prove that they have been living in the U.S. for at least three years, but members are split on amnesty if illegal immigrants are employed and not dependent on government services (45 percent favor to 45 percent oppose).

When asked who should be considered first priority for legal immigration, 43 percent said those who have job skills or qualifications that are in short supply, followed by 23 percent choosing those with family ties to people already in the country, and 20 percent preferring a "first come, first serve" system.

Fifty-six percent of NFIB members support admitting foreign nationals to fill skilled jobs where government-certified shortages exist, and 62 percent favor allowing people to enter the country, work for a specified period, and return home.

Increasing penalties for employers who *knowingly* hire illegal aliens was supported by 78 percent of the small-business owners surveyed. Small-business owners would consider verification of an ID used by an employee to prove eligibility to work a moderate burden. However, the burden could be reduced by a single location verification/authorization system that would certify document authenticity.