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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on a survey of over 1000 small business owners across the United States. Surveys were conducted in the field in Washington, Oregon, California, Ohio, Maine, Vermont, New York, New Jersey and Florida. This diverse group of businesses was surveyed in both rural and urban settings. Business sizes vary from 1 to 100+ employees, with the majority below 25 employees.

Key findings include:

THE ECONOMY & TAXES

Small business owner respondents believe that:

• Increasing consumer demand is what is needed most to create more jobs and get the economy back on track. Most small business owners report that more customers will help them to create more jobs, not having lower taxes or fewer regulations.

• Big corporations should pay more taxes. They strongly support closing corporate tax loopholes. The majority of respondents said big corporations are paying less than their fair share of taxes. A strong majority responded that corporate tax loopholes are hurting their businesses and see closing corporate tax loopholes as a necessary revenue-raising opportunity, to be prioritized before making further budget cuts.

• Economic development incentives aren’t working for small businesses. Most small business owners surveyed responded either that economic development incentives are giveaways to big business or that they had little to no knowledge or experience with them, with a vast majority never having accessed any.

JOB QUALITY & WORKPLACE ISSUES

Small business owner respondents support:

• Paid family leave. While a majority don’t currently offer paid family leave, most small business owners surveyed support a national paid family and medical leave program.

• Earned paid sick days. While just over half don’t currently offer earned paid sick days to their employees, a majority of small business owners surveyed support a national earned paid sick days policy, like the Healthy Families Act.

• Raising the minimum wage. An overwhelming majority believe that anyone working full-time deserves to be out of poverty.
STATE SPECIFIC DATA

- **Oregon** – A majority of respondents support closing corporate tax loopholes and increasing the Oregon corporate minimum tax in order to invest in public education.

- **Ohio** – Over 80 percent of respondents support legislation to reduce pregnancy discrimination in the workplace.

- **Maine** – An overwhelming majority of respondents support raising the Maine minimum wage.

- **Vermont** – More than 2/3 of respondents support a statewide earned paid sick days policy in Vermont.

- **New Jersey** – A vast majority of respondents do not currently offer a retirement plan to their employees, but a majority support a state-sponsored, pooled retirement plan.

- **New York** – Two-thirds of respondents believe expanding New York’s Temporary Disability Insurance to cover family leave would benefit small business.

- **Florida** – Three-quarters of respondents support legislation to promote more equitable hiring practices.
INTRODUCTION

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. Small businesses create jobs, deliver essential goods and services in communities across the country, and help to bolster development of local economies. Seen as some of the most trusted messengers in our society, thriving small business owners are a critical component for a prosperous local and regional economy.

As real-life experts on the economy—and the challenges and opportunities of running a business—small business owners have important perspectives on how to shape public policies to support strong local economies. This report focuses on the experiences and views of small business owners across the country as documented in a survey conducted in 2015. The survey evaluated small business owners’ experiences and views on the economy, and workplace benefits, as well as state-specific issues like retirement security, health care, the minimum wage and discrimination in the workplace.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a survey of 1163 small business owners from a range of cities and towns across the United States. Locations were chosen based on demographic and geographic criteria, with a particular focus on communities of color and underrepresented business owners. Interviewer-based surveys with business owners were conducted in their places of business, in Washington, Oregon, California, Ohio, Maine, Vermont, New York, New Jersey and Florida. Less than 1 percent of surveys were collected through email and over the phone.

Survey results reported here are rounded to the nearest percentage point.

RESPONDENT INFORMATION

Among respondents to this survey, 77 percent had zero to five employees (36 percent sole proprietors), 14 percent had six to ten employees, 5 percent had eleven to twenty-five employees, 3 percent had twenty-six to fifty employees and 1 percent had over fifty employees.

Approximately 51 percent of the respondents identified as female and 49 percent identified as male.

Of those business owners who provided their racial/ethnic background, 17 percent self-identified as people of color (3 percent self-identified as African-American or Black; 7 percent as Latino/a; 2 percent as East Asian or Pacific Islander; 2 percent as Middle Eastern; 2 percent as an immigrant; less than 1 percent as American Indian or Alaskan Native; less than 1 percent as South Asian), 52 percent self-identified as White/Caucasian, and 31 percent declined to report their race/ethnicity.
REPORT FINDINGS

THE ECONOMY & TAXES

As the country’s economy slowly recovers, local communities rely on the strength and growth of small businesses. To better understand what small businesses need in order to thrive economically, the Main Street Alliance surveyed business owners about a range of tax and economic issues and policies.

What Small Businesses Need to Create Jobs and Get the Economy Back On Track

The survey queried small business owners about the economy and what small businesses need to create jobs. It posed the following question:

“What do you believe small businesses need most to create jobs and help get the economy back on track?”

A. Lower taxes
B. Fewer regulations
C. More customers
D. Other

In response, 52 percent of participating small business owners responded with “more customers,” 27 percent of respondents chose “lower taxes,” 9 percent chose “fewer regulations,” and 12 percent chose “other.”

Taxes and Tax Reform

The survey also asked respondents about taxes and corporate tax reform:

“Do you think that large corporations currently pay more than their fair share of taxes, pay their fair share of taxes, or pay less than their fair share of taxes?”

In response, 72 percent of small business owners surveyed said they think large corporations pay less than their fair share of taxes, and only 2 percent said large corporations pay more than their fair share. Eight percent said they pay their fair share. Eighteen percent were undecided.
The survey then asked:

“Thinking about the question above, do you think that practice helps small business, hurts small business, or has no impact?”

Almost 75 percent of small business owners surveyed said that the use of these corporate tax loopholes harms their small businesses. Two percent said they help their business, eight percent said they didn’t see an impact on their business, and sixteen percent were undecided.

Digging in deeper, the survey asked the following question:

“Do you think closing corporate tax loopholes (corporate inversions, offshore tax havens, incentives to moving jobs offshore, etc) to increase revenues before making further budget cuts would help small business, hurt small business, or have no impact on small business?”

Seventy-one percent said that closing corporate tax loopholes would help their small business. Five percent of respondents said that would hurt their businesses, eight percent said there would be no impact on their businesses, and sixteen percent were undecided.
Economic Development Incentive Programs

Many celebrate the successes of economic development incentive programs in the United States in bringing much-needed resources to small businesses. In the next series of questions, the Main Street Alliance asked small businesses about their views on economic development incentive programs.

To begin, the survey asked respondents to complete this sentence:

“Economic development incentives are...”

A) Giveaways that mostly go to big businesses and do little for small businesses
B) Too expensive and undermine public services that benefit all employers
C) Public investments essential for job creation and economic growth
D) A necessary evil
E) Programs of which I have little knowledge or experience
F) No opinion

In response, 33 percent reported having “little knowledge or experience with the programs and requested more information,” 30 percent said economic development incentives were “giveaways that mostly go to big businesses and do little for small businesses,” 17 percent said they were “public investments essential for job creation and economic growth,” 15 percent had no opinion, 3 percent responded they were “too expensive and undermine public services that benefit all employers,” and 2 percent believed they are “a necessary evil.”

Economic development incentives are...

Giveaways that mostly go to big businesses and do little for small businesses. 30%
Too expensive and undermine public services that benefit all employers. 3%
Public investments essential for job creation and economic growth. 17%
A necessary evil. 2%
Programs of which I have little knowledge or experience. 33%
No opinion. 15%
The survey then asked the business owners: “Have you ever accessed an economic development incentive program?”

Eighty percent reported never accessing any economic development incentives, another five percent did not know, and only fifteen percent of the respondents had ever used or benefited from an economic development incentive program.

Summary

Contrary to popular belief, small business owners surveyed believe that increasing consumer demand—not lifting taxes—is the most important factor to help small businesses create jobs and spur the economy. These findings suggest strong support for policies tailored toward expanding the customer base, rather than policies aimed at cutting taxes or deregulation.

At the same time, these small businesses do feel that the current tax system is rigged against them, with large corporations reaping the benefits of corporate tax loopholes. Not only do the small businesses surveyed believe that these tax giveaways hurt their own businesses, but that corporate loopholes rob the country of vital revenue streams needed to boost the economy. To remedy this, large corporations, like their small business counterparts, must pay their fair share of the taxes.

Finally, it is clear from these responses that the economic development incentives aimed at supporting small Main Street businesses are not reaching their target audience. Instead, what little information that does make it to small business owners leads them to believe that the benefits are largely going to big businesses.
JOB QUALITY & WORKPLACE ISSUES

Many small business owners around the country proudly promote high road business practices in the workplace, such as offering health care and a decent wage, providing paid time off, and finding other ways to invest in their employees. Studies show that these practices make smart business sense; they stabilize the workforce, improve public health, and reduce costs associated with employee turnover. To better understand the small business perspectives on job quality and workplace issues, the Main Street Alliance posed a series of questions.

Earned Paid Sick Days

As noted, offering earned paid sick time for employees is a low-cost policy that provides many benefits for employers—a more stable and invested pool of workers, reduced costs for businesses, and more satisfied workers.

This survey specifically asked small business owners about an earned paid sick leave standard for all employers.

First, business owners were asked whether they offered any paid time off for their employees.

Of those who responded to this survey, 44 percent currently offer some kind of paid time off to their employees, while 56 percent do not.

The respondents were then asked:

“Would you support or oppose a national sick leave/PTO standard (like the Healthy Families Act) for all employers?”

A majority, 65 percent, would support a standard for all employers, compared to 19 percent who would oppose such a standard and 16 percent who were undecided.

Notably, support for an earned paid sick days standard was even higher among women business owners and business owners of color, with 71 percent expressing support, 18 percent opposed, and 11 percent undecided.
Interestingly, many of the respondents, including those not currently offering earned paid sick leave, said that they would offer earned paid sick days if a universal standard were in place to ensure a level playing field.

**Paid Family Leave**

Like access to earned paid sick days, offering paid family and medical leave increases employee loyalty and reduces turnover and its associated training costs.

In this survey, respondents were first asked if they currently offer any paid family leave to their employees. Eighty-seven percent of small business owners surveyed do not offer paid family leave, compared to thirteen percent who do.

The business owners were then asked:

“Would you support or oppose a paid family leave policy that applies nationwide?”

Among respondents, 64 percent were in support of such a policy, 12 percent were opposed, and 23 percent were undecided. As with support for earned paid sick days, women and business owners of color were more likely to be supportive, with almost 75 percent favoring a national paid family leave policy. Only 8 percent were opposed and 18 percent undecided.
Minimum Wage

Continuing public concern over income inequality has led to efforts in cities and states across the country to raise the minimum wage, sometimes significantly. The Main Street Alliance wanted to get a sense of how small business owners feel about employee compensation, income inequality, and minimum wage related issues. First, business owners were asked about their general thoughts on poverty and wages.

The Main Street Alliance posed the following question: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Someone working full-time should not be living in poverty?”

Among respondents, 86 percent agreed that those working full-time should not be living in poverty, while only 7 percent disagreed, and 7 percent were undecided.

Then, small business owners were asked about a minimum wage increase in their city or state. Note that the wage increases we surveyed varied from $12 to $15, depending on the city or state jurisdiction. “Do you support or oppose raising the minimum wage in your city/state?”

Across all states, 59 percent of respondents support raising the minimum wage, 29 percent were opposed, and the remaining 12 percent were undecided.

Summary

The Main Street Alliance asked small business owners about high road business practices that help to boost the economy and reduce inequality, such as offering health care, a decent wage, providing paid time off. Our results showed an overarching support for family-friendly workplace policies and wage increases.

Specifically, our findings demonstrate support for earned paid sick leave and family leave policies among small business owners surveyed. Notably, while fewer than half of small businesses surveyed currently offer earned paid sick days for their employees, an overwhelming majority was supportive of a national earned paid sick day policy. A similar pattern was found for paid family leave, with only 13 percent currently providing this leave but over 60 percent in favor of a national family and medical leave policy.

The widespread support for national earned paid sick days and paid family leave, particularly among those that do not currently offer these policies, indicates an important role for public policy. Our findings suggest that, with the successful passage of thoughtful earned paid sick day and paid family leave policies, the number of businesses able to implement these programs would likely expand.

Beyond paid leave, results from this survey reveal widespread support for minimum wage increases among surveyed small business owners. These businesses believe that anyone working full-time deserves to be out of poverty, and that more money in people’s pockets means a stronger economy and more customers.
Seven years ago I realized my dream of owning my own business when I opened a small neighborhood ice cream shop. I was able to corner my city’s market for artisan ice cream and produced a product that people lined up to purchase. Today, I operate six locations, with plans to break ground on our seventh location in the coming months. I employ between 60 and 70 employees in the winter months and as many as 140 throughout the summer.

Since opening, I have woven my progressive values into my business model and use them as a means to strengthen my relationship with my employees and my customers. Originally known for my compostable products and locally sourced, organic ingredients, I decided to go public with my decision to cover 100 percent of health care premiums for all full- and part-time employees and immediately received positive feedback.

I was an early supporter and adopter of earned paid sick leave in Seattle because it is a responsible workplace policy that is good for my workers, my customers and for me, as the owner of a growing small business. Ensuring that workers can earn paid time encourages workers to stay home when they’re contagious, and this is especially important for workers who handle food, provide health care, or have close contact with the public.

When Seattle began discussions surrounding their minimum wage increase, I made sure I was involved in the conversation, and I was confident a decision could be made that was in the best interest of small business owners and low-wage workers. The decision to phase in the wage increase over time for small businesses was achieved when small business owners like me came to the table and voiced our concerns over an immediate raise in wages. We have ensured that businesses like mine are able to benefit from the boost in the local economy following each phase and translate that to a boost in employee paychecks.

The whole economy benefits when we raise the wage floor, so I support a $15 minimum wage for Washington State. In addition to the state minimum wage hike, it is imperative that we raise the federal minimum wage. I grew up in Idaho, where workers are earning the federal minimum of $7.25 and workers who receive tips are paid just $2.13. Workers can’t be expected to survive on wages that low, and they can’t be expected to be customers at local businesses like mine. They simply can’t afford to be. Raising the minimum wage isn’t a Seattle thing to do. It’s not a New York thing to do. It’s an American thing to do.
SPOTLIGHT: KEVIN LITWIN, JOE’S AUTO PARKS, LOS ANGELES

When Joe’s Auto Parks was founded in 1959, the minimum wage was just $1 an hour. Now, over 50 years later I am proud to say that minimum wage for our staff and all workers in Los Angeles will reach $15 an hour over the next five years.

Our commitment to offering fair wages is nothing new, and we have been using it as a tool to attract the best and brightest employees for years. That is how we grew to be one of the largest parking operations in Los Angeles, employing over 300 Angelenos.

In the parking industry, we make money when people go out for a night on the town or a trip to the ballpark. No matter where you go you need a place to park, and putting more money in workers pockets give them the opportunity to come out and enjoy a night with their families.

The revenue increases following raises in the minimum wage aren’t exclusive to the parking industry. Restaurants will take more reservations, stadiums will sell more tickets, and retail stores will move through inventory quicker. Families will have the ability to shop at stores they previously couldn’t afford, and shop owners will find a broader audience for their goods and services. Expanding your customer base is part of any good business model, and raising the wage does that more than even the most expensive advertising campaign.

A good business model also puts emphasis on quality customer service, and we know that the happiness of our customers is inextricably connected to the happiness of our employees. The best customer service comes from happy employees, whose needs are being met, and who are receiving an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work.

Raising the wage won’t just make your employees happier, it will make them healthier. Low-wage workers are at a much higher risk for health problems associated with the stresses of living paycheck to paycheck and limited access to healthy foods options. Fresh foods and organics are priced at a point that is out of reach for workers making the current minimum wage, and that doesn’t bode well for their health or the success of our local farmers and produce stores.

Workers in LA can now expect incremental increases in their earnings while businesses across the city can look forward to increased revenues following each wage increase. Still, too many communities across California and the nation are left behind. It is time to address stagnant wages at the state and federal level so employees and employers across the country can thrive.
While many large corporations tend to favor lowering corporate taxes, our survey suggests small businesses have a different perspective. The Main Street Alliance asked small business owners from Oregon extended questions on taxes to get a better sense of their attitudes on corporate taxes and state investment.

First, business owners were asked: “Do you think that large corporations currently pay more than their fair share of taxes, pay their fair share of taxes, or pay less than their fair share of taxes?”

In response, 68 percent felt that big corporations are currently paying less than their fair share of taxes. Only 2 percent felt that big corporations are currently paying more than their fair share of taxes, 6 percent responded they are paying their fair share, and the remaining 25 percent were undecided since they don’t know how much big corporations are paying in taxes.

Oregon business owners were then asked about public investment in education: “Do you think that increasing investment into our public school system would help small business, hurt small business, or have no impact on small business?”

Sixty-two percent of respondents felt that increased investment in public education would help their small businesses, four percent believed it would harm their business, fourteen percent felt they would see no impact, and the remaining twenty percent were undecided.

The last question probed respondents about the source of the funding for that increased investment.

“Currently the Oregon corporate minimum tax is $150. Would you support or oppose raising the corporate minimum tax for C-Corps with over $25 million in sales per year in order to increase investment in public education?”

An overwhelming majority, 77 percent, would support increasing the corporate minimum tax, with 5 percent opposed and 18 percent undecided.

Most Oregon small business owners surveyed are not opposed to corporate taxes. In fact, many would support increasing corporate taxes to fund the state’s school system—an investment that they believe would have positive spillover effects for their small businesses. However, the small business owners surveyed did feel that the largest corporations are not paying their fair share of taxes. Rather than cutting corporate taxes, small business owners would like larger corporations to pay their owed portion of taxes.
SPOTLIGHT: MAURICE RAHMING, O’NEILL ELECTRIC, PORTLAND, OREGON

At O’Neill Electric, we are proud of our growth over the last 18 years and now employ 65 of the most talented electrical professionals in the state. We have a responsibility to our employees, and they depend on us for their livelihood. We don’t just feel responsible for the livelihood of those 65 employees, though. Each of our employees has a family of their own to support, and we feel responsible for them as well.

Large corporations that operate in Oregon don’t share the same responsibility that we do. They focus on their bottom line and will leave their employees and our community out to dry if cost becomes an issue. When they manipulate the tax code to drastically reduce their tax bill, they leave small business owners like me to pick up the tab. Worse yet, they leave our infrastructure and public school systems underfunded and in a state of disrepair.

It is extremely difficult to compete against larger corporations. Their ability to dodge their tax responsibility is a huge reason for that. For every dollar large corporations pay in taxes, I pay eight. We certainly can’t call that a level playing field.

Large corporations can hire high-priced lawyers, lobbyists and accountants to create tax loopholes that reduce their tax bill to zero. Use of these loopholes, as well as paying the lowest wages and providing limited benefits, allows these corporations to undercut small businesses and threaten our very existence.

These large corporations also get huge tax breaks — often based on promises they make to create new jobs-- but those jobs don’t always last. As soon as profit margins thin out, they are quick to lay off workers or even leave the state entirely.

We know that these large corporations get millions in tax breaks. We know they’re making promises that they aren’t sticking to, and it is time we hold them accountable to pay what they owe.

Holding corporations accountable to pay their fair share and closing the loopholes they use to dodge their tax responsibility will help our communities by restoring our infrastructure and funding the education programs that fuel my business’s growth.

My business would not achieve success without the hard work and knowledge of my employees. Career and technical education programs in high school are vital in Oregon’s economy and provide a very important pipeline into our industry. Unfortunately, these programs are being slashed due to budget shortfalls.

These shortfalls should be addressed by demanding that corporations pay their fair share and invest in our community, rather than extract our wealth and hold their revenues overseas, which only benefits their shareholders.
There is increasing attention to the disproportionate impact that family responsibilities place on women’s economic and financial security. Women, especially during pregnancy, often face barriers in the workplace that impact their economic trajectory. The Main Street Alliance reached out to rural and urban small business owners across Ohio to gauge their attitudes about pregnant workers.

Businesses were asked the following question:
“Thirteen states have enacted policies giving pregnant workers the right to temporary job modifications, enabling them to continue working without jeopardizing their health or the health of their pregnancies. Would you support or oppose a similar anti-discrimination proposal in Ohio?”

An overwhelming majority, 83 percent, said they would support such a policy in Ohio while only 11 percent were opposed, and 6 percent undecided.

The survey then asked:

“Would you support or oppose a statewide policy to give reasonable accommodations to pregnant employees, such as more access to the restroom?”

Again, Ohio small business owners from this survey supported such a policy, with 86 percent voicing support, 6 percent opposed and the remaining 8 percent undecided.

Ohio small business owners surveyed in both rural and urban areas are supportive of a public policy solution to protect women from pregnancy discrimination in the workplace. They are also in favor of job protections to ensure that workers who are pregnant can remain in the workplace and are not forced to leave their job in order to preserve their health.
SPOTLIGHT: KENYA GIBBS, RAW MATERIAL SALON, COLUMBUS, OH

At Raw Material Salon, we focus on bringing out the innate beauty of our customers. We believe that your hair can be glorious. Specializing in the care of African-American hair, our hair salon boasts a team of skilled stylists. From haircuts to coloring, we offer a range of great styles. Our salon also offers texturing services and other hair treatments so you can get the cutting edge style you want. We are located in the Short North neighborhood of Columbus and encourage our customers to stop in for their appointment and then head right out to one of the nearby bars and restaurants to have fun with friends.

Between our busy lives at work and home, we often take for granted the ability we have to move around without pain and discomfort. Unfortunately, many women experience symptoms during pregnancy that make the simplest of movements uncomfortable. Without the appropriate workplace standards in place they are often forced to take unpaid time off or leave their job entirely.

In Ohio, legislators are considering bills that address the discrimination and lack of accommodations women face during their pregnancy. In the salon industry, pregnant workers experience difficulties when spending long hours on their feet, so it’s necessary for many women to be able to take time throughout the day to sit down and relax.

Chemicals associated with hair, nails and makeup can also be toxic and could harm the mom and child. In salons that use these hard chemicals, pregnant workers need to avoid the use of those chemicals and salon owners need to ensure that the salon is properly ventilated.

While the needs of pregnant workers are relatively straightforward in many cases, there are no specific protections on the books. The Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA) says that when pregnant workers have symptoms that are similar to a disability, they should be given the same rights as a person with a disability. Where this law falls short is with the unique symptoms and needs of pregnant workers.

Using the example of chemical exposure, there may not be a known disability that requires limited exposure to such chemicals. However, avoiding these chemicals is important for the health of the woman during her pregnancy. In this case, the PDA would not apply to their needs.

This is why we need a statewide anti-discrimination policy that allows women to feel safe and protected in the workplace and remain on the job as long as possible. Keeping women on the job during pregnancy is not only essential for most families, but it is good for our economy and businesses like mine that cater to women.

Seventeen municipalities across the state have protections for pregnant workers on the books. It is time the rest of the state followed suit.
MAINE

Municipalities and states across the country are working to reduce economic inequalities by increasing wages. Support for a statewide raise in the minimum wage has grown, following the raise in Portland. The Maine Small Business Coalition (MSBC), the Main Street Alliance affiliate in Maine, surveyed business owners in the state on an increase of the minimum wage to $12 per hour.

Specifically, they asked:

“Do you support the referendum to raise Maine's minimum wage that is sponsored by Mainers for Fair Wages and endorsed by MSBC?”

An overwhelming number, 87 percent, of respondents supported the raise, with just 8 percent opposed and 5 percent undecided.

Results from this survey underscore the strong support by businesses owners for an increase in the state’s minimum wage. Maine business owners surveyed echoed the sentiment heard from small business owners across the country that a minimum wage increase is an important tool to boost the economy and reduce inequality.
At Veneer Services Unlimited, we make custom components for other woodworkers using wood veneer, which is real wood that has been sliced very thin—typically the thickness of about four pieces of paper. We make custom tabletops and doors for furniture- and cabinet-makers to incorporate into their projects. We’ve also developed special processes to create unique products, like curved plywood and other innovative products.

I have been in the business for 25 years and have done countless high profile projects, as well as everyday work with local and regional woodworking shops. The work we do allows smaller companies to compete with larger competitors and complete projects they wouldn’t otherwise have the capacity to do. Our business enables customers to get the work they are looking for from local Maine small companies, and that helps fuel our local economy.

After having to downsize a few years back as a result of the recession, we are in the process of building our staff back up to the level we had prior to the downturn in the economy. In order to sustain this growth, we must ensure that Mainers can afford products and services that small companies like mine provide.

Raising the minimum wage in Maine will help keep our products and services affordable and attainable to a larger customer base. Increased demand for our work will help us continue to create high-paying jobs—reducing unemployment and increasing sales, driving growth throughout the state.

My employees work hard, and they are the heart and soul of my business. I show them I respect their performance and abilities by building a fair pay scale into my business model. Unfortunately, many hardworking employees throughout Maine are earning minimum wage while working for employers who don’t show them the respect they deserve.

There is a belief that when business owners hire an employee, they are being charitable. But in reality, they are addressing a need to fill the demand for their products and services. When you treat an employee properly and pay them enough to support their families, you can grow your business with that employee and build lasting relationships.

If a business needs to pay a starvation wage in order to make it, then there is something wrong with their business model. Fair wages should be built into the expense sheet just as paying your rent and your vendors are. To spark growth at businesses like mine, and show workers across all sectors the respect they deserve, we must raise the minimum wage for all Mainers.
VERMONT

For a number of years, Vermonters have been working toward passing a statewide earned paid sick time program. Earlier this year, a proposal passed through one chamber of the Vermont Legislature, and in 2016, it will move through the next.

To get the perspective of Vermont’s small businesses on the issue of earned paid sick time, the Main Street Alliance of Vermont surveyed business owners across the entire state.

First, business owners were asked whether they offer paid time off. Among respondents, 55 percent currently do not offer any kind of paid time off to their employees, and 45 percent currently do. The business owners who currently have some kind of policy were then asked how many days they provided.

Among those who provide sick leave, 20 percent currently offer less than 5 days, 14 percent offer 5 days, 34 percent offer 6-10 days, and 32 percent offer more than 10 days.

All small business respondents were then asked:

“In general, do you support establishing a minimum standard of earned sick time in Vermont?”

Among respondents, 68 percent voiced support, 14 percent were opposed, and 18 percent remained undecided.

Results from this survey demonstrate a desire for a state minimum standard for paid earned sick time among small business owners. Indeed, while a slight majority of small businesses surveyed are not able to offer any kind of earned paid sick leave, most businesses surveyed would like there to be a minimum standard. Moreover, those that do offer earned paid sick leave provide generous benefits, with over 60 percent offering 6 or more days. Business owners surveyed in Vermont see an investment in their employees as a wise investment in their businesses.
SPOTLIGHT: RANDY GEORGE & ELIZA CAIN, RED HEN BAKING, MIDDLESEX, VT

Red Hen Baking Company was established on September 1, 1999, and for our first eight years in business, we focused almost exclusively on baking and delivering fresh bread to area stores and restaurants. Soon after we got our start, we found that the Vermont community was even more supportive of our efforts than we had imagined they would be.

By the end of our first year in business we had a staff of eight, working nearly around the clock every day of the week, and our daily delivery area ranged across Vermont and into New Hampshire. We quickly became an established presence in the area’s many cooperative and independent food stores. Our bread began to appear at more and more of the area’s finest restaurants and farmers’ markets. To this day, these venues still make up the core of our wholesale business.

Although we have grown considerably since our early days, we remain dedicated to creating the very best food from the best ingredients we can find, and we couldn’t do it without our dedicated staff, which now numbers over 40 and includes bakers, chefs, and baristas, as well as delivery, maintenance, and office personnel.

We got involved with the Main Street Alliance of Vermont as a means to connect with the community that had supported us for so long, and to ensure that the decisions made in the state legislature are in the best interest of the small businesses that fuel the Vermont economy.

The state legislature is currently considering the Healthy Workplaces Bill, which would ensure that workers who must miss work because of illness or to care for an ill family member would be able to take this time without facing the impossible reality of losing income or their job. We have been asked to speak publicly about our support for earned paid sick days and were even invited to the White House to talk about how the policy would not hurt, and could even help, small businesses.

It is important to us that we keep talented and dedicated employees on our staff, and happy and productive employees tend to stay with you. This legislation will support working families and be a boon to Vermont’s economy. Most importantly, this is simply the right thing to do.

Small businesses contribute to their communities in all kinds of ways. One of the most important contributions they can make is to provide good, steady employment to those that make our businesses run every day. If a business depends on exploiting people in order to be profitable, I believe that it needs to challenge itself to correct that problem.
NEW JERSEY

In New Jersey, there is a movement to help support business owners and workers save more for retirement. As this issue progresses, the Main Street Alliance of New Jersey wanted to understand the views of small businesses on the issue of retirement security.

In addition to questions on taxes, job quality and trade, New Jersey business owners were asked the following questions about retirement plans:

“Do you currently offer a retirement plan for your employees?”

Eighty-seven percent responded no, with only thirteen percent saying they have a plan currently.

Next, respondents were asked: “Do you have a retirement plan or other retirement savings for yourself and your family?”

Sixty-four percent of respondents said they do have some kind of retirement plan, while thirty-six percent do not.

For the last question, the respondents were asked: “Would you support or oppose creating a pooled retirement option for small businesses owners in New Jersey and their employees that would reduce administrative and financial liabilities?”

In response 59 percent voiced support, 8 percent were opposed, and 32 percent remained undecided, requesting more information on such a policy.

Most New Jersey small business owners surveyed do not offer retirement plans for their employees, despite having plans for themselves. However, they are broadly supportive of a pooled retirement option, which would provide greater retirement security for themselves, their families, and their employees.
Since 2009, I have served as the Executive Director of the Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company (CDDC). Prior to leading CDDC, I served as consulting Executive Director to Creative Outlet Dance Theatre of Brooklyn, and I was the founding Executive Director of Youth Entertainment Studios (YES), Inc., a national media arts organization focused on at-risk youth. I have an extensive and eclectic background embracing community activism, with a passion for the arts and social issues, global marketing and consulting for nonprofits and small businesses.

In 2008, I joined the Main Street Alliance of New Jersey and quickly became a spokesperson in the media and the legislature. I began serving on the Main Street Alliance Steering Committee in 2009, and I have participated in virtually every major campaign since I joined MSA, but most recently I’ve become heavily involved in the Secure Choice campaign.

The Secure Choice Act would make it easier for employers like me to set up retirement options for our staff members. This issue strongly resonated with me in part because it would directly benefit my dance company.

CDDC currently employs 14 people, and like the 1.7 million other workers throughout New Jersey, we don’t have access to a workplace retirement plan. We work hard to retain the highest caliber staff and dancers, and competition is fierce in the Tri-State area. Being able to offer benefits like Secure Choice would help give us a competitive edge over other companies.

Small business owners and non-profit directors like myself want to offer our employees a workplace retirement plan, but we simply lack the resources, expertise, and time required to purchase and implement such a plan. The Secure Choice Act will allow us to offer flexible, portable, and professionally managed retirement plans for our employees and ourselves.

The Secure Choice Act will help us compete with large corporations and for-profit companies that can afford to hire human resource divisions to manage retirement options in ways that small business owners don’t have the ability to do. Being able to give your employees the peace of mind that comes from building towards their retirement and being able to use the policy as a tool to attract and retain talent makes the Secure Choice plan a sound policy for New Jersey small businesses.
NEW YORK

With only 13 percent of workers in the United States having access to paid family leave through their employers, and less that 40 percent with access to paid medical leave, New York is exploring adopting an expanded paid family and medical leave program. To get a sense of how the small business community feels about the issue, the Main Street Alliance asked small business owners a series of questions about paid family and medical leave.

When asked: “Have any of your employees requested time off in the last 5 years to welcome new babies or to care for seriously ill family members?”, 67 percent said yes, and 33 percent said no.

Respondents were then asked: “The Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) program, funded by employer and employee contributions, allows new mothers 6 to 8 weeks paid time off for pregnancy recovery. Do you currently offer any additional family leave time for workers?”

Only 11 percent offered additional leave, while 89 percent did not.

The survey then asked about expanding the TDI program: “California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island have expanded their TDI systems to enable all workers to be eligible for 12 weeks of paid family leave. (The cost of expansion is born by employees only at an estimated .45 cent per week increase in TDI paycheck withdrawal.) If New York were to do this, do you feel it would help or hurt small businesses, or have no impact?”

Of respondents, 66 percent felt that expanding the TDI program would help small business, 3 percent didn’t think there would be an impact, 11 percent believed there would be a negative impact on business, and the remaining 20 percent were undecided.

Finishing this series of questions, respondents were asked: “New York TDI benefits have been capped at $170 per week since 1987. Do you believe this cap should gradually be adjusted upward? (The cost of gradually adjusting upward the TDI benefit cap would be shared by employees and employers.)” Seventy-nine percent of respondents believed that the TDI benefit cap should be adjusted upwards, with only five percent opposed and sixteen percent undecided.

Most small business owners surveyed in New York do not offer extended leave to their employees. However, they recognize the need for this benefit. A majority supported expanding access to paid family and medical leave through the TDI and felt that this would be beneficial for their business.

Furthermore, surveyed small businesses were in favor of increasing the TDI cap in New York, despite the marginal financial cost for employers.
SPOTLIGHT: AMY COLLINS, NEW SHELVES DISTRIBUTION, PITTSFORD, NY

At New Shelves Distribution and Publishing Services, we are passionate about helping those with good books gain a solid footing in the marketplace. We have been the best chance for small presses and the best source of information from the front lines of publishing since we opened in 2006.

The more an author or publisher knows about the book industry, the better off we all are. That is why whatever we know, we are happy to share. We are thrilled to be able to assist authors and publishers who are looking for help navigating the book sales and distribution marketplace.

I couldn’t run a successful operation without the help of my great group of employees. They give me their full effort while at work and focus completely on their jobs. While a focus on the job is important, it is also important that my employees are able to dedicate their time and energy to their family members during a time of need.

That is why I am in support of expanding our state’s Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) program to provide up to 12 weeks of paid leave, during which employees can recover from illness or injury, care for a sick or injured loved one, or welcome a new addition to their family. Without this common sense protection, a period of illness or injury can turn into a financial nightmare.

For new parents who do not have access to paid leave, the unmatched joy of welcoming a child into their home can be marred by the fear and anxiety associated with accounting for lost income during the period of time they are unable to work. With a small contribution from the employee and employer, these fears can be alleviated and parents can spend this time bonding with and adapting to life with their new child without wondering how they will keep their lights on.

I value my employees, and I know that our commitments to excellent service are not achievable without them. They need me most when they are experiencing life changes or facing an illness or injury, and having a paid leave policy in place like the one proposed for the state of New York will help me make sure my employees can count on me, just as I count on them.
In Florida, policies dubbed “Ban the Box” have been passed and enacted in a number of local municipalities. “Ban the Box” removes the criminal conviction question from job applications and delays the inquiry until the employer is identified as a candidate for the position. Given the impact of this policy on their hiring practices, the Main Street Alliance of Florida surveyed business owners across the state on these issues.

Business owners were first asked, “Do you believe that having to check a box that says whether or not you have ever been convicted of a crime on a job application hurts an applicant’s chance of being called for an interview?” An overwhelming majority, 95 percent of respondents, said yes while only 5 percent felt there wouldn’t be an impact.

Next, the small business owners were asked: “Do you support legislation that removes ‘the box’ and delays the criminal conviction question or background check until the interview process?” Seventy-five percent would support such a policy while twenty-five percent were opposed.

The survey went on to ask about small business owners’ existing hiring practices: “Which of the following best describes the impact a criminal record has on your businesses hiring process?”

A. A record is something to consider, but if the candidate is qualified they deserve an interview and a chance to explain themselves;
B. We are committed to giving a fair chance to all applicants. The most talented and experienced candidate will get the job, regardless of their record, or;
C. We have a strict policy against hiring people with backgrounds.

Half reported that “a record is something to consider, but if the candidate is qualified they deserve an interview and a chance to explain themselves,” forty-five percent “are committed to giving a fair chance to all applicants, the most talented and experienced candidate will get the job, regardless of their record,” while only 5 percent “have a strict policy against hiring people with backgrounds.”

The overwhelming majority of Florida business owners surveyed in said that requiring an applicant to answer a question on a job application regarding prior criminal convictions hurts that applicant’s chance of being called for an interview. Furthermore, 75 percent of small business owners surveyed reported that the would support a policy that required the removal of criminal conviction pre-screen check boxes from job applications, leaving those questions for the interview process. Half of the business owners who responded to the survey reported that they believe that a criminal record is something to consider, but that qualified candidates deserve a chance to explain themselves and 45 percent said that they believe that all applicants deserve a fair chance.
SPOTLIGHT: ANTHONY JAMES, KUSTOM SOUNDS STUDIO, LONGWOOD, FL

In 2006, my business partner and I joined the likes of Apple, Disney, and Amazon when we started our business in my garage. While we haven't yet achieved the wild successes of our fellow garage-born businesses, we have experienced significant growth over the last nine years and can attribute that to the hard work and talent of our employees.

Kustom Sounds Studio in Longwood, Florida originally focused on music production and vocal engineering, but has since expanded into digital mastering, event D.J. services, and production of promotional materials. We have become a one-stop shop for local artists, some of whom have gone on to achieve national recognition for their work.

With two owners, three staff members, and interns from Orlando-based Full Sail University, we have outgrown our current space and are working to secure a larger studio. As we expand the business, we plan to open up more staff positions. It is very important to us that these openings are filled by the most talented applicant.

That is why we practice fair hiring and do not ask an applicant about their criminal conviction history during the hiring process. We are interested in finding the applicant with the best resume and experience, regardless of their background. Joining the movement to “Ban the Box,” --removing the criminal conviction question from job applications-- was a no-brainer for us.

Having to answer “yes” on the criminal conviction question gives employers and hiring managers a reason to discriminate against applicants and to judge them based on a mistake they have made in the past, rather than who they are today.

Small business owners across the country should take a good look at their application process and ask themselves if they are limiting their options and reducing the qualified applicant pool at their business. If they are passing over applicants who checked the box, then they are doing just that.

We all see the vicious cycle of incarceration and poverty in our communities, and this is an issue that hits close to home for us. We are committed to doing our part to break the cycle and reduce the rate of recidivism. When individuals are released from prison only to find out that no employer will trust them, or view them for who they are now, they are left with few options other than returning to the behavior or poor decisions they made in the past.

Communities with a fair hiring policy in place can expect to see a reduction in unemployment, homelessness, and recidivism, while businesses that take up the cause can expand their applicant pool and ensure the best and brightest applicants are interviewed for open positions. Fair hiring is a win-win for businesses and communities and helps provide an invaluable second chance to individuals with a prior conviction.
CONCLUSION

The Main Street Alliance 2015 Voices of Main Street survey evaluated small business owners’ experiences and views on the economy, workplace benefits, and state-specific issues like retirement security, health care, the minimum wage and discrimination in the workplace.

In talking with 1163 small business owners across the country, we found strong support for workplace standards like earned paid sick leave, paid family leave, higher minimum wages, and policies designed to ensure that large corporations pay their share of taxes.

On economic development incentives, our survey indicates that these initiatives are not working for small businesses. Small businesses see these programs as geared toward large businesses, not mom-and-pop stores struggling to get by. If policymakers intend for economic programs to help small businesses, they should re-tailor the programs, make them more accessible and relevant to small businesses.

Regarding taxes, we found that small businesses surveyed are not opposed to paying corporate taxes. Indeed, they believe strongly in generating revenue to build infrastructure, improve schools, and invest in communities. However, they also said that large corporations are shirking their responsibility. Policymakers should focus on making sure that corporations pay their fair share, closing tax loopholes and accounting tricks that let these companies off the hook.

Finally, our survey shows that, contrary to popular belief, small businesses support workplace policies, such as increasing the minimum wage, providing earned paid sick leave, and paid family and medical leave and tend to see these types of policies as good for the economy and their businesses. In particular, the small businesses surveyed support national legislation that would set up an earned paid sick leave or family leave program. Policymakers should further explore promising state and federal proposals on earned paid sick and medical leave, which could help small businesses who want to offer this time off but face financial and logistical barriers to doing so.
State-by-State Break Down of Data - A1

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<th>Total</th>
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State-by-State Break Down of Data - A2

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<tr>
<td>Would you support or oppose a national sick leave/PTO standard (like the Healthy Families Act) for all employers?</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>Oppose</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you currently offer paid family leave to your employees?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>107</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would you support or oppose a Paid Family Leave Policy that applies nation wide?</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>92</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undecided</td>
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<td>64</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Responses</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>OH</td>
<td>ME</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>FL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Someone working full time should not be living in poverty?</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>142</td>
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<td>Disagree</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Undecided</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you support or oppose raising the minimum wage?</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>118</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</table>
The Main Street Alliance creates opportunities for small business owners to speak for ourselves to advance policies that are good for business and the communities we serve.