

On the Rise: Women Influencing Politics

By Sujata Srinivasan

THIS YEAR, WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS WILL help elect 36 governors, 33 U.S. senators, and 435 members of the House of Representatives. The economy and jobs, affordable healthcare and moral values are the top three concerns among the majority of women business owners across the nation, according to a recent survey conducted by two national pollsters—Lake Research Partners and the polling company inc.—for Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP), a Washington, D.C.-based bi-partisan group.

Of the 400 women business owners interviewed via telephone, an overwhelming majority (78 percent) said they would definitely vote in the upcoming elections and elect officials to Congress and state offices. Only one percent said they definitely will not vote. The rest were undecided.

Six out of 10 women believed that the country—and their businesses and families—would be better off if more women were elected to office.

An overwhelming majority (68 percent) said women-owned small businesses can influence the outcome of an election. When informed that there are 10.6 million small business owners who generate \$2.5 trillion in revenue in the U.S., a higher number of respondents (76 percent) said women business owners can influence the outcome of an election.

“Women in Connecticut should be encouraged by the results of this survey, although more work is yet to be done,” says Barbara Kasoff, president and co-founder of WIPP.

“Connecticut is fortunate to already have women representing the state in Washington, D.C., as well as in Hartford. But this survey clearly demonstrates that we can be better served with more women business owners in government leadership positions. Connecticut still has four more seats in Congress to fill with women.”

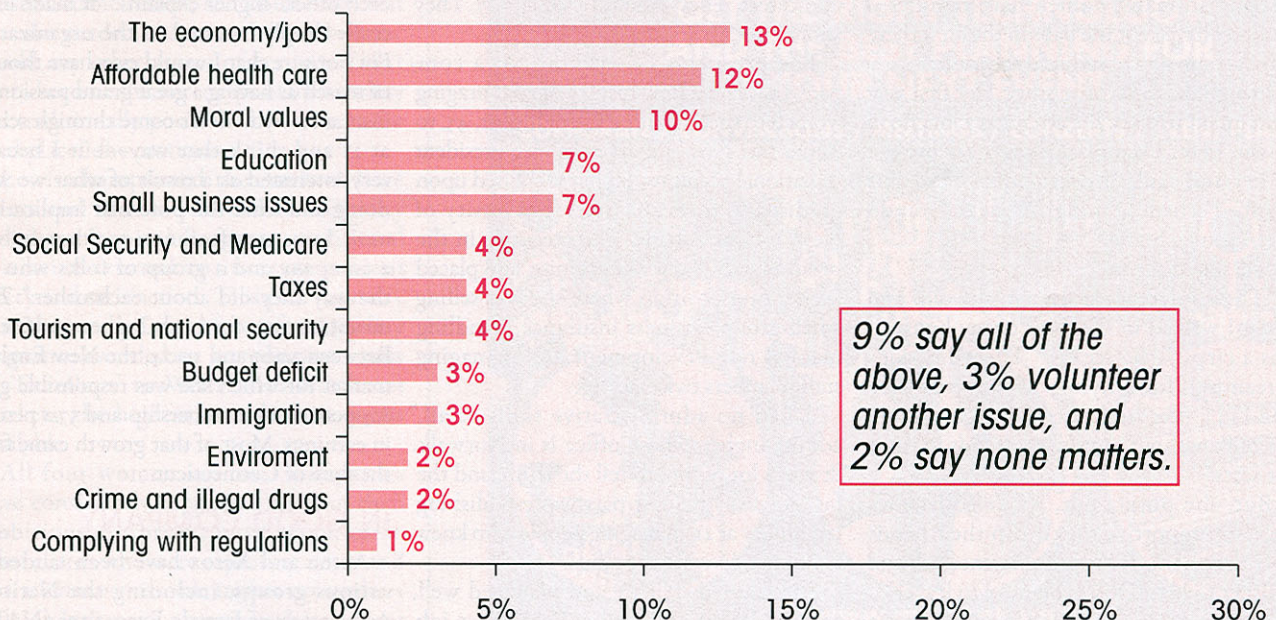
For Norwalk-based Linda Coughlin, one of the eight sponsors of the survey, affordable health care is the foremost issue. Her company, Metro Home NYC, which is based in New York City, foots 50 percent of its employees' health care expenses. “I am fortunate that I can do this for my 20 employees. But not all small business owners can,” she says. “If we were to speak with one voice as women, we can absolutely influence an election.”

Betty Spence of West Cornwall, a participant in the survey, believes that as elementary as it may sound, more women business owners should recognize the connection between their business needs and who they vote for. “You don't see that now, either at the state or federal level,” she says. There are a multitude of issues that need to be addressed, she points out. One of them, she says, is the federal government's goal of awarding 5 percent of its contracts to women business owners. “Right now, it's less than a measly 2 percent,” she notes.

In the sample surveyed, more Democrats than Republicans believed that voting was extremely important to them personally (67 percent versus 58 percent), while more Republicans than Democrats felt voting was extremely important to them as a small business owner (68 percent and 53 percent). Of the 400 respondents, 36 percent were Democrats, 37 percent were Republican, and 24 percent were independent. The remaining 3 percent were undecided.

When asked how they believed was the best way to personally make a difference in the electoral process, 38 percent said one's vote made the biggest difference. Other responses included running for elected office (4 percent), writing letters or sending e-mails about an issue (16 percent), talking to friends and family about who to vote for (15 percent), volunteering for a political campaign (6 percent), donating money to a political campaign (4 percent), donating money to a political action committee (2 percent), or all of the above (9 percent). Only 2 percent of the women surveyed felt that none of the above made any difference.

What Matters? Top Issues for the 2006 Congressional Elections



9% say all of the above, 3% volunteer another issue, and 2% say none matters.

SOURCE: Women Impacting Public Policy, Lake Research Partners the polling company inc. May 2006