

Poll ranks employment as Mainers' No. 1 concern

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Jobs and employment top the list of concerns for Mainers in 2008, but gasoline prices, energy-related issues and the cost of living also rank high.

That's according to recent results of the Pan Atlantic SMS Group Omnibus Poll, a survey conducted by a company based in Portland that asked residents about everything from the economy, to who they likely will vote for during the November elections. Asked what is the most important issue facing Maine today, 22.3 percent of respondents answered jobs.

With residents facing tough economic times amid climbing heating fuel and gas prices, people questioned in the survey ranked those concerns near the top of the list — a first for the statewide survey.

Neither was listed as a concern during six previous Pan Atlantic surveys, dating back to February 2005, the report states.

"'High gas prices' is second overall," among the concerns of Mainers the report states, noting it topped the list for 15.8 percent of respondents. "This is the first time this issue has been cited to any significant degree by responders to the Pan Atlantic SMS Group Omnibus Poll."

Tax reform, at 13.3 percent, the cost of living (9.3 percent), health care (8 percent) and energy-related concerns (7 percent) rounded out the top five concerns Mainers listed.

Nearly half of Maine citizens polled (49.8 percent) reported that they plan to drive 'a lot less' this summer due to gas prices, while 32.5 percent answered 'somewhat less,' the report states.

The company polled 400 registered voters in Maine between June 10 and June 18 who said that they are likely to cast ballots come November. The survey has a 95 percent confidence rate, plus or minus 4.9 percent.

The results of the poll state that 59.8 percent of Maine citizens think the state is heading in the wrong direction when it comes to the economy.

Fifty-three percent of residents gave Gov. John Baldacci a "good" or "excellent" rating for his last six years in office, with 45.1 rated his performance as "poor" or "very poor."

When asked who would be elected president of the United States if the election were held today, those surveyed picked U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., (36.8 percent) over Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., (25.8 percent). A total of 18.3 percent said they were still undecided.

President Bush didn't rate very well, with 68 percent of those polled rating his presidency as a "failure."

Those polled selected U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, by 47.5 percent to defeat U.S. Rep. Tom Allen, D-Maine, at 28.8 percent. They also responded that they would be more likely to vote Democratic during state congressional races.

A proposed casino in Oxford County was shot down by those surveyed with 46 percent saying it's not a good idea with 29.3 percent endorsing it. And those polled also support a ban on driving while using a cell phone, with 68.3 percent saying a law should be passed, and 27.8 opposing a ban.

Those polled said they would spend their 2008 stimulus tax rebate check on: current bills (30 percent), next winter's heating bills (24.8 percent), savings (17 percent), and travel (12 percent), with 13.2 percent saying they don't know how they would be spending their rebate. Another 3 percent said they are ineligible for the rebate.

The last question on the survey asked residents what technological items or services they have. Cell phones, at 80.5 percent, topped the list, followed by digital cameras (73.3), high speed Internet (59.8) and iPod or MP3 digital music players coming in fourth at 44.5 percent.

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