

Small Business Optimism Rises Despite 'Cliff'

NEW YORK (AP) — Small business owners were slightly more optimistic at the end of 2012 even as they awaited the outcome of negotiations in Congress over the "fiscal cliff."

That's the finding of a survey by the National Federation of Independent Business, a lobbying group. The NFIB's small-business-optimism index rose half a point from its level in November to 88. The index remains near its lowest readings on record.

The survey was completed on Dec. 28, four days before the House voted for a bill that spared tax increases on the middle class and postponed steep budget cuts.

The NFIB says its January survey may more accurately reflect how owners feel. With year-end political and tax issues resolved, they can focus on the economy.

The December index reading was lifted in part by owners' slightly higher expectations that their sales would rise in 2013. Employment in the sector was virtually unchanged.

And it was clear that they were waiting to see the outcome of the talks in Washington before making plans to invest in equipment or expand. More than half — 52 percent — said they did not want to take out a loan. Companies often borrow when they're getting ready to expand — or hire.

The NFIB questioned 648 of its members selected at random for the survey.

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