

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/business/articles/0611offshore11.html>

Workers not happy about offshoring

58% surveyed favor penalties against firms

Jonathan J. Higuera
The Arizona Republic
Jun. 11, 2004 12:00 AM

A national survey shows widespread discontent among U.S. workers about corporations sending jobs overseas and should serve as a wake-up call to employers, according to the survey's sponsor.

Employers need to communicate their labor strategy to workers, even if they have no plans to use foreign labor. That's one conclusion of the survey conducted for the Employment Law Alliance, a network of labor and employment attorneys.

The survey of nearly 600 people found that 58 percent of U.S. workers believe that companies sending work overseas, or "offshoring," should be penalized by the federal government.

"This issue is really resonating out there," said Rick Cohen, a partner at Phoenix's Lewis and Roca law firm, the Arizona representative for the ELA network. "This is much greater reaction than with layoffs in general. There is a sense out there we shouldn't be trading jobs for profits."

While only 6 percent said they have lost a job because of offshoring, 30 percent said they know someone who had lost a job because of offshoring. Eight percent said they feel personally at risk of a losing a job because of offshoring.

"To me, this survey says people are really not going to look at the complexities of an issue and think, 'Is this good for the economy?' " Cohen said. "They are concerned about their jobs and the jobs of their family members."

Still, 39 percent of respondents said U.S. companies should be free to outsource work overseas, and 46 percent of respondents said the news media have made the issue into a bigger crisis than it should be.

Federal government data released Thursday found that only 1.9 percent of the mass layoffs conducted during the first quarter of this year were attributable to offshoring. Of the 239,000 workers dismissed in mass firings (classified as 50 or more employees), only 4,633 could trace the job loss to operations moving overseas or contracted foreign businesses doing the work.

The statistics do not reflect layoffs of fewer than 50 people, nor do they capture layoffs occurring at establishments with fewer than 50 workers total.

The transfer of U.S. jobs overseas emerged as an issue in this year's presidential election campaign when the economy was adding fewer jobs than had been generated during previous

expansions. In three speeches in February and March, presumptive Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry vowed to change the tax code to stop "Benedict Arnold CEOs" from moving jobs overseas.

In the ELA survey, conducted in late May, 52 percent said they would turn to government agencies or elected officials to address the issue, 37 percent said they would seek help from labor unions and 21 percent said they would be willing to turn to the courts for recourse. Those surveyed could choose more than one answer.

"That's telling us that even though there has been a decline in union membership, employers have to heed the message that this could lead to union organizing," Cohen said. "People feel that strongly."

The ELA conducts quarterly surveys on subjects of interest to its members. The poll has an error rate of plus or minus 4.04 percent.

Bloomberg contributed to this report.

Reach the reporter at jonathan.higuera@arizonarepublic.com or (602)444-8831.