

Since 2000, Alice Manufacturing Co. in Easley has continued to change, with investments in technology. One machinery upgrade included a multimillion dollar capital investment in new automated air jet weaving technology. MYKAL MCELDOWNEY /STAFF / FILE

Survey shows manufacturers upbeat

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Manufacturers are showing the highest level of business optimism since late 2012, according to the latest National Association of Manufacturers/ *IndustryWeek* survey of companies.

"Manufacturers in America are making more products today and making them better than ever before, which is why they believe in a bright future of growth and job creation," said NAM Chief Economist Chad Moutray.

"However, Washington's burdensome regulatory, tax and health-care policies still loom large in manufacturers' business decisions, particularly for the smallest companies. Manufacturers are prepared to make the investments that will jump-start our economy, but we need Washington to work with us, not against us."

The survey found that 86.1 percent of respondents were either somewhat or very positive about their company's outlook, the highest sign of manufacturer confidence since the fiscal cliff debate of 2012.

The optimism was attributed, in part, to manufacturers' legislative and legal gains, including the recent budget deal, which took the specter of a government shutdown off the table for two years, and the legal victory against the National Labor Relations Board's poster rule, NAM officials said Monday.

Last year, an appeals court struck down a federal rule that would have required millions of businesses to put up posters informing workers of their right to form a union.

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The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit said the NLRB violated employers' free speech rights in trying to force them to display the posters or face charges of committing an unfair labor practice.

Unions had hoped the posters would help them boost falling membership.

The NAM, U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other business groups complained the regulation violated free speech rights by forcing employers to display labor laws in a way that some believed was too skewed in favor of unionization.

In the survey, the top business challenge, cited by 79 percent of respondents, was what manufacturers consider an unfavorable business climate due to taxes, regulations and government uncertainties, including Washington's inability to solve problems.

Rising health care and insurance costs followed closely behind, with uncertainties attributed mostly to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, NAM officials said.

The survey also found manufacturers plan to increase their spending by 1.9 percent over the next 12 months, up from 1.4 percent in December.

Associated Press contributed.