Poll finds business pessimistic

By JOE GYAN JR.
New Orleans bureau

NEW ORLEANS — Small-business owners in Louisiana don't feel the state's economy will improve under either Edwin Edwards or David Duke, according to the results of a statewide survey released Tuesday by Loyola University's Small Business Institute.

Nearly 47 percent of the 81 businesses surveyed said Edwards' election would have an unfavorable impact on Louisiana's economic prospects, and almost 57 percent said Duke's election would not be favorable to the state's economy.

Both Edwards and Duke received the same favorable rating of just 19.8 percent, the survey results indicated.

Independent of the governor's race, more than 60 percent of the small-business owners questioned said they now feel neither uncertain, 30.9 percent, or unfavorable, 29.6 percent, about Louisiana's economic prospects, according to the survey.

Only 24.7 percent viewed those prospects as favorable.

"There is serious discontent with the state's tax structure, and the vague tax relief promises of the candidates are not calming it," said Loyola business professor John Vinturella, who directed the survey.

The telephone survey was conducted Nov. 5-6 by Loyola marketing research students. The surveyed businesses, which were randomly selected, had an average of 11 employees and had been in business for an average of 18 years.

The survey included a dozen businesses each from Baton Rouge, New Iberia, Alexandria and Shreveport; 15 from both Orleans and Jefferson parishes; and three from Winnboro.

When asked how electing Edwards would affect Louisiana's economic prospects, the respondents graded the former three-term governor this way: 46.9 percent unfavorable, 19.3 percent favorable, 21 percent neutral and 12.3 percent uncertain.

When asked the same question in relation to Duke, respondents scored the state representative from Metairie this way: 56.8 percent unfavorable, 19.8 percent favorable, 13.6 percent neutral and 9.9 percent uncertain.

Respondents' characterizations of Edwards included "experienced," "the lesser of two evils," "business as usual," "had his chance" and "won't help anybody but himself," according to the survey results.

"They acknowledge Edwin Edwards' effectiveness, but his election conflicts with their impatience for a change in the way we are governed," Vinturella said.

Respondents' descriptions of Duke consisted of "someone different," "no expertise or background," "won't be able to work with the Legislature," and "absolute worst for small businesses," the survey showed.

"They approve of David Duke's concept of minimal government but have little confidence in his ability to implement his ideas and fear the consequences of his election," Vinturella said.

An equal number of small-business owners who expressed some optimism in either runoff candidate also wished to have Gov. Buddy Roemer back, he added, and one owner asked "Where was Dave Treen when we needed him?"