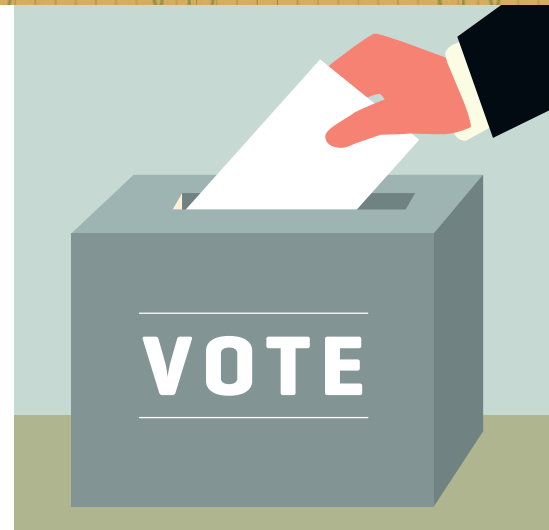


By **Beth Geraci** / Senior Editor

Cast your ballot

The uncertainty of an election year weighs on landscape contractors.



Who will win the 2012 presidential election is anyone's guess. But according to our 2012 Industry Pulse survey, 57 percent of landscape professionals say the election is affecting their 2013 business outlook.

The election is still up for grabs, but it's less of a mystery which candidate landscape contractors are overwhelmingly behind: Mitt Romney. Green Industry support for Romney stems less from him and more from his politics.

Brad Johnson, founder and president of Brad Johnson's LawnAmerica in Tulsa, Okla., says he's concerned, not just from a business, regulation and tax standpoint, "although those are pretty huge. But just the overall direction of the country. There are some big concerns of how that's been going."

Many others in the industry are likewise anxious about what lies ahead. For Dave Reed, vice president of Meadows Farms Landscape in Chantilly, Va., the upshot of the election will hit close to home. The company has many clients who work in the Washington, D.C. metro area.

"The election is a big deal for us," Reed says. "A good number of our customers work for the government, either directly or indirectly. When we start talking about government cutbacks, those are pretty important considerations for us."

Reed says overall there's a lot of stability in government-related work and being near the Beltway "is a lucrative place to be" no matter who's sitting in the White House. But many of Reed's clients work in defense. If the government cuts defense spending by say, 20 percent, he says, it would make an impact. Because let's face it: "The defense clients are the big spenders."

The health care factor

Landscape contractors also worry about the impact an Obama win would have on health care costs. Dan Sohovecky, vice president of finance at San Diego-based New Way Landscape & Tree Services, says his No. 1 election concern is Obamacare, specifically its mandate that businesses with more than 50 employees must provide health insurance.

That's because New Way is just 30 miles from the Mexico border. Many of its workers live in Mexico and have alternative sources of health care.

"A number of them aren't interested in insurance," says Sohovecky. "It makes it more painful for everyone. Our employees are being forced to have it, and we're being forced as an employer to provide it and pay for it."

Keeping a level head

Some say things will be better no matter who wins the election, because we'll know what to expect.

Ricardo Baldi, president and owner of Baldi Gardens Landscape in Arlington, Texas, says the economic situation is improving there and he's getting more calls and more business. "I have a lot of hope," he says of the election. "I'm not too worried about it. In my opinion, both parties are the same, pretty much. They complain about each other, but they're pretty much the same in the end."

If Obama wins, Johnson worries the capital gains tax will be raised to help pay for changes in health care. But he's been here before.

Johnson says his company will still grow, no matter who wins. "We're not going to cry about it," he says. "But I sure would rather have policies in place that are more friendly to business owners." **LM**