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EVEN IN TIMES OF BUDGET CUTS, NEW JERSEYANS WANT EDUCATION PROTECTED

Residents support cuts to municipal aid, environmental programs, public transportation and property tax rebates, Rutgers-Eagleton Poll finds

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J – Despite recognition that the state budget needs to be balanced, New Jersey residents believe cuts should be avoided in the areas of education and poverty relief, according to a Rutgers-Eagleton Poll released today. Majorities want no budget reductions at all in state aid to local schools (57 percent) and programs for the poor (51 percent), while 49 percent oppose cuts to state colleges and universities. A large majority (72 percent) also opposes making it easier to lay off school teachers.

At the same time, majorities of New Jerseyans reject raising additional state revenues through increased taxes or fees to solve the budget problem and especially oppose raising the gas tax and raising state income tax rates generally (72 percent opposed for each).

Residents are willing to accept cuts in some areas, however, with only 31 percent opposing cuts to municipal aid, 39 percent opposing cuts to environmental programs and 42 percent opposing cuts to property tax rebates.

"Our recent poll showed that half of New Jerseyans are displeased with Governor Chris Christie's proposed budget," said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science at Rutgers University. "These new results give a good sense of residents' priorities in this difficult time. Laying off teachers or significantly cutting school aid are not seen as solutions. On the other hand, given today's economic challenges, people do not want to see their own costs increase either. The state is between a rock and a hard place, with clear support for a limited number of solutions, one of which is cuts to municipal government."

Unwilling to make cuts to public education or aid to the poor

Garden State residents strongly oppose funding cuts for their schools; 57 percent are against any cuts, while 15 percent want such aid cut deeper and 26 percent want lesser cuts. Higher education also fares well, as 49 percent oppose any reductions in college and university funding while 18 percent want deeper cuts and 30 percent want more modest cuts. "Though overall there seems to be little stomach for deep school aid cuts, this is driven by Democrats and independents, nearly two-thirds of whom oppose reducing school aid, while only 38 percent of Republicans oppose cuts," said Redlawsk. He added that independents side with Republicans on cuts for higher education, with a minority of each groups opposing cuts. Conversely, 65 percent of Democrats oppose higher education cuts.

Independents favor protecting local schools and teachers, but are less supportive of state funding for higher education in the current economic environment.

New Jerseyans also want to protect the poor – 51 percent want no cuts in state programs to aid the poor, and 76 percent do not want to balance local budgets by making it easier to decrease assistance to the needy. There is broad agreement on protecting such help at the local level, with only 33 percent of Republicans, 23 percent of independents and 10 percent of Democrats supporting cuts. Republicans, however, are much more likely to support reductions to programs for the poor at the state level, with only 34 percent opposing any state cuts, compared to 53 percent of independents and 62 percent of Democrats.

"There is great sympathy for the poor, probably driven by the broad effects the recession has had on people at all economic levels," said Redlawsk. "At the same time different political philosophies come into play, with conservatives supportive of local efforts but ready to cut statewide programs, while liberals do not want cuts to the poor at any level."

New Jerseyans willing to fire municipal workers, but not teachers

Given options on how the state could make it easier to balance local budgets, 57 percent of those polled favor making it easier to fire municipal workers; 38 percent oppose this approach. About one-in-four wants to ease restrictions to lay off teachers and police, and one-in-five favors making it easier to cut assistance to the poor.

"New Jerseyans appear to think there are too many municipal workers and that layoffs in this area could help close local budget gaps," said Redlawsk. He observed that in addition only 31 percent oppose cutting state aid to local governments. "Clearly if there are to be state aid cuts, most residents want them to hit municipal budgets, not school budgets," he said.

Raising revenues through taxes and fees nixed by most

New Jerseyans overwhelmingly oppose increasing taxes or fees to close the state budget gap, with resistance strongest to raising the gas and state income tax. Seventy-two percent of respondents oppose either measure. Only 25 percent support an increase in the gas tax and 24 percent support a general increase in state income tax. Residents also oppose raising highway tolls (58 percent) and are against fare hikes on buses and trains (57 percent).

Garden Staters are least resistant to an increase in business tax. Just over 51 percent oppose an increase in business tax, while 43 percent express support for such a measure.

"The challenge to the state is how to make the necessary cuts and revenue enhancements to balance the budget," said Redlawsk. "New Jerseyans are not completely unrealistic, but they do not want across the board cuts. Yet they do not want to pay more in taxes and fees.

"In a late February Rutgers-Eagleton poll, 61 percent opposed eliminating the surtax on high income residents. Even Republicans were more in favor of the surtax (47 percent) than opposed (46 percent). There is no reason to think this has changed over the last month. Taken together with today's results, this suggests Garden State residents want to protect school funding and poverty programs, are willing to cut municipal funding and want the pain spread around to include high-income New Jerseyans."

Rutgers-Eagleton Poll March 31-April 3, 2010

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted from March 31-April 3, 2010 with a scientifically selected random sample of 953 New Jersey adults. Data are weighted to represent known parameters in the New Jersey population, including gender, age, race, education, and Hispanic ethnicity. All results are reported with these weighted data. Of these 953 adults, a weighted sample of 809 had heard at least something about Gov. Chris Christie's proposed budget. This group is the focus of most of the tables in this release.

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for a sample of 953 adults is +/-3.2 points, at a 95 percent confidence interval. The sampling error for 812 adults ware of the budget is +/-3.4. Thus if 50 percent of 953 New Jersey adults favored a particular position, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.8 and 53.2 percent (50 + 3.2) had all New Jersey adults been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects.

Weighted Sample Characteristics
(n=953 Adults)

42% Dem	48% Male	26% 18-29	66% White
32% Independent	52% Female	38% 30-49	11% Black
26% Republican		19% 50-64	15% Hispanic
		17% 65+	7% Asian
			1% Other/Multiple

Rutgers-Eagleton Poll March 31 - April 3, 2010
Questions and Tables

The questions covered in the release of April 13, 2010 are list below. Column percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. All percentages are of New Jersey adults.

Q. To balance the state budget, some government services will be cut more and some will be cut less. For each of the following, tell me if it should be cut back more, less, or not cut at all.

[ROTATE LIST]	State Aid to Local Gov't	Environ-mental Programs	Property Tax Rebates	Colleges and Universities	Public Transport-ation	State Aid to Schools	Programs for the Poor
Cut deeper	25%	24%	24%	18%	15%	15%	14%
Cut less	39%	35%	31%	30%	36%	26%	32%
Not cut at all	31%	39%	42%	49%	45%	57%	51%
Don't Know (Vol)	4%	2%	3%	2%	4%	2%	3%
N=	951	950	950	950	953	953	951

Demographic Breakdowns: Percentage saying to "NOT CUT AT ALL" for each service:

	Dem	Ind	Rep	Liberal	Middle	Conserv	Male	Female
State aid to Local Gov't	38%	26%	28%	32%	32%	25%	38%	40%
Environmental Programs	49%	38%	23%	51%	39%	27%	43%	59%
Property Tax Rebates	47%	37%	38%	34%	43%	40%	48%	51%
Colleges and Universities	65%	44%	34%	58%	52%	36%	45%	45%
Public Transportation	51%	43%	37%	47%	46%	36%	53%	61%
State Aid to Schools	65%	63%	38%	65%	63%	38%	30%	32%
Programs for the Poor	62%	53%	34%	62%	51%	40%	36%	47%

Demographic Breakdowns: Percentage saying to "NOT CUT AT ALL" for each service:

	HS or less	Some Coll	Coll Grad	Post Grad	Empl FT	Empl PT	Retire	Not Empl
State Aid to Local Gov't	40%	32%	22%	21%	27%	34%	40%	31%
Environmental Programs	48%	32%	33%	37%	32%	48%	38%	47%
Property Tax Rebates	50%	42%	35%	26%	35%	40%	58%	44%
Colleges and Universities	55%	46%	47%	46%	43%	51%	47%	62%
Public Transportation	53%	43%	37%	41%	39%	45%	48%	52%
State Aid to Schools	62%	55%	52%	55%	53%	65%	54%	65%
Programs for the Poor	54%	54%	46%	46%	41%	70%	54%	61%

Demographic Breakdowns: Percentage saying to "NOT CUT AT ALL" for each service:

			Income			
	Rent Home	Own Home	< 50K	50k - <100K	100K- <150K	150K+
State Aid to Local Gov't	28%	39%	41%	28%	22%	23%
Environmental Programs	34%	48%	50%	30%	29%	31%
Property Tax Rebates	43%	40%	51%	43%	37%	20%
Colleges and Universities	46%	56%	61%	42%	46%	35%
Public Transportation	41%	51%	60%	36%	40%	39%
State Aid to Schools	53%	67%	70%	53%	49%	43%
Programs for the Poor	46%	61%	63%	45%	43%	43%

Demographic Breakdowns: Percentage saying to "NOT CUT AT ALL" for each service:

	Race			
	White	Black	Asian	Latino
State Aid to Local Gov't	29%	41%	34%	38%
Environmental Programs	34%	44%	61%	64%
Property Tax Rebates	39%	48%	53%	56%
Colleges and Universities	42%	74%	73%	67%
Public Transportation	40%	54%	60%	52%
State Aid to Schools	52%	70%	75%	72%
Programs for the Poor	47%	63%	60%	59%

Q. Some state taxes or fees might have to be raised to balance the budget. For each tell if you would support or oppose an increase. [ROTATE LIST]

	Business Taxes	Fares on Trains and Buses	Highway tolls	The Gas Tax	The State Income Tax
Support	43%	40%	38%	25%	24%
Oppose	51%	57%	58%	72%	72%
Depends (vol)	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Don't Know (vol)	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%
N=	953	951	953	953	953

Demographic Breakdowns: Percentage saying SUPPORT increase for each revenue source:

	Dem	Ind	Rep	Liberal	Middle	Conserv	Male	Female
Business Taxes	50%	43%	31%	58%	45%	30%	41%	36%
Transit and bus fares	37%	42%	45%	39%	44%	39%	30%	20%
Highway Tolls	36%	47%	34%	48%	42%	29%	27%	22%
Gasoline Tax	23%	30%	22%	31%	26%	18%	43%	43%
State Income Tax	28%	27%	17%	28%	28%	13%	44%	37%

Demographic Breakdowns: Percentage saying SUPPORT increase for each revenue source:

	HS or less	Some Coll	Coll Grad	Post Grad	Empl FT	Empl PT	Retired	Not Empl
Business Taxes	41%	41%	46%	48%	46%	44%	34%	41%
Transit and bus fares	32%	44%	45%	51%	47%	31%	33%	37%
Highway Tolls	29%	34%	52%	50%	43%	33%	35%	34%
Gasoline Tax	14%	24%	31%	50%	32%	13%	23%	20%
State Income Tax	28%	18%	26%	24%	26%	24%	18%	26%

Demographic Breakdowns: Percentage saying SUPPORT for each revenue source:

			Income			
	Rent	Own	< 50K	50-<100K	100K-<150K	150K+
Highway Tolls	40%	35%	33%	37%	48%	46%
Gasoline Tax	27%	20%	17%	28%	33%	39%
State Income Tax	23%	29%	30%	25%	18%	28%
Business Taxes	40%	48%	38%	57%	46%	36%
Transit and bus fares	44%	33%	31%	44%	52%	46%

Demographic Breakdowns: Percentage saying SUPPORT for each revenue source:

	Race			
	White	Black	Asian	Latino
Highway Tolls	42%	34%	24%	35%
Gasoline Tax	27%	16%	23%	13%
State Income Tax	23%	33%	11%	33%
Business Taxes	43%	48%	31%	53%
Transit and bus fares	45%	25%	30%	28%

Q. To cut costs and help solve local budget problems, should New Jersey make it easier to:

[ROTATE LIST]	Fire Municipal Workers	Lay Off some School teachers	Cut Back on the Number of Police	Cut Back on Assistance to the Poor
Yes	57%	24%	23%	20%
No	38%	72%	74%	76%
Don't Know (Vol)	5%	3%	3%	4%
N=	948	950	951	948

Percentage saying YES, New Jersey SHOULD make it easier to:

	Dem	Ind	Rep	Liberal	Middle	Conserv	Male	Female
Fire municipal workers	45%	60%	71%	49%	54%	71%	57%	56%
Lay off some teachers	14%	27%	40%	11%	22%	41%	28%	21%
Cut back on # of police	18%	26%	27%	23%	20%	29%	28%	18%
Cut back assist to poor	10%	23%	33%	9%	20%	29%	24%	17%

Percentage saying YES, New Jersey SHOULD make it easier to:

	HS or less	Some coll	Coll Grad	Post Grad	Empl FT	Empl PT	Retired	Not empl
Fire municipal workers	51%	58%	63%	59%	57%	46%	55%	62%
Lay off some teachers	20%	27%	28%	29%	24%	23%	32%	22%
Cut back on # of police	24%	19%	24%	24%	25%	19%	14%	25%
Cut back assist to poor	16%	19%	27%	23%	22%	16%	24%	16%

Percentage saying YES, New Jersey SHOULD make it easier to:

			Income			
	Rent	Own	< 50K	50-<100K	100K-<150K	150K+
Fire municipal workers	61%	46%	48%	56%	58%	70%
Lay off some teachers	29%	16%	21%	23%	22%	36%
Cut back on # of police	24%	22%	15%	30%	19%	36%
Cut back assist to poor	21%	20%	11%	24%	24%	30%

Percentage saying YES, New Jersey SHOULD make it easier to:

	Race			
	White	Black	Asian	Latino
Fire municipal workers	61%	48%	49%	35%
Lay off some teachers	28%	7%	28%	7%
Cut back on # of police	25%	13%	27%	20%
Cut back assist to poor	22%	7%	32%	2%