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Poll finds 76% of New Jerseyans feel they don't get their money's worth

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NEWJERSEYNEWSROOM.COM

A whopping 76 percent of New Jerseyans feel they don't get their money's worth for the taxes they pay, according to a Rutgers-Eagleton Poll released Wednesday. Only 18 percent disagree.

A review of 40 years of Rutgers-Eagleton polls reveals that the outlook is nothing new. In 1972, before the passage of the state income tax, 73 percent of New Jerseyans said they paid too much for public services. Only in 1984 did fewer

than 70 percent say they did not get their money's worth; 64 percent were disgruntled while 29 percent thought they paid the right amount for services.

Residents also recognize New Jersey is a high tax state: 85 percent say they pay more than other states. But that recognition was slow in coming. In 1972, fewer than 10 percent thought they paid more. By 1984 this had climbed above 50 percent, and it has continued a steady rise since.

"Historical data show that state and local taxes in New Jersey have been among the highest in the nation for at least the past 40 years." Prof. David Redlawsk, the poll's director, said. "But it took a while for people to fully recognize that fact, even though complaints

about taxes have been around as long as taxes themselves."

As previously reported, more than half of voters (52 percent) support Christie's proposed 10 percent cut in the state income tax while 36 percent are opposed. Even so, 76 percent would rather see property taxes cut first, though most wouldn't balk at saving tax money from either source. However, most overestimate what a 10 percent income tax cut would mean, with a median expected savings of nearly

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\$750, compared to a typical cut of about \$100 for median-income earners.

The Democratic-controlled Legislature maintains the proposed tax cut is mainly for the benefits of wealthy New Jerseyans who support Christie and has no intention of sending him a tax cut bill to sign.

Driving both findings may be the widespread belief that more is paid than is gotten in return. Moreover, awareness that New Jersey sits at the top of the list of high-tax states is now pervasive.

“While voters may not really know what an income tax cut means to them, they are painfully aware of the state’s reputation as one of the most highly taxed in the nation,” Redlawsk said. “Whatever the amount they’ll get from a tax cut, they no doubt hope it will ease some of the pain.”

Since the first Rutgers-Eagleton Poll in 1972, data shows that New Jerseyans do not feel they get a good return on their tax dollars – 21 percent thought they “got their money’s worth” from state and local tax payments, and 73 percent felt otherwise. Twelve years later, attitudes improved a bit, with 29 percent saying they got their money’s worth and 64 percent believing they paid too much for what they got. But negatives hit 70 percent by 1990 and currently stand at 76 percent.

While New Jersey’s tax rates have been among the top five nationally since the 1970s, resident did not realize this in 1972, when only 9 percent said they paid more than other states, while 44 percent thought they paid the same and a third actually believed they paid less.

“The view that we pay less than other states is now as rare as declining property taxes,” Redlawsk said, noting that only 1 percent of New Jerseyans now think they pay less, while 85 percent say they pay more than in other states.

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