Cornell poll: Most in state see more risk than revenue in gas drilling

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The majority of New Yorkers feel the risks of drilling for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale outweigh any revenue that may come from it, according to a poll by the Cornell University Survey Research Institute. The poll, conducted between Feb. 1 and March 29, covered subjects ranging from medical marijuana to quality of life issues, economic perceptions and the state budget.

Interviewers asked residents which of three statements best reflects their opinion about natural gas drilling in New York State: The revenues that would come to NYS from natural gas drilling outweigh any risk of contaminating the drinking water, the risk of contaminating the drinking water outweighs any revenues that would come to the state from natural gas drilling or do not know enough about the natural gas drilling issue. Out of a sample of 800 subjects, 53 percent across the state said the risks outweigh the revenues, and 25 percent said the revenues outweigh the risks. Twenty two percent said they did not know enough about the issue to offer an opinion.

The gap was less pronounced upstate, researchers found.

"The results are quite interesting," said Survey Research Institute Director Yasamin Miller. "Though the majority opposed drilling, upstate residents were more in favor of it. The implication is that upstate is just so economically depressed, they're looking at the (drilling) business as an opportunity to bring in jobs and revenue to the area."

Among upstate residents, 43 percent said the risks of drilling outweighed the revenues. Those with this opinion still outnumbered the 35 percent who said the revenue outweighed risks, but the gap was less pronounced than downstate, where 59 percent said the risks outweigh revenues and only 20 percent held the opposite opinion.
In both regions, about the same percentage of people said they didn't have enough knowledge of the issue to form an opinion -- 22 percent upstate and 21 percent downstate.

The poll also found that while people across the political spectrum were more likely to say the risks outweighed the benefits, that trend decreased among conservatives. Those saying risks were a greater concern made up 60 percent of those identifying as liberal, 54 percent of those identifying as moderate and 44 percent of those identifying as conservative. Those saying revenues outweighed risks made up 18 percent of liberals, 24 percent of moderates, and 34 percent of conservatives.

Among those affiliated identifying with a political party, 63 percent of Democrats and 48 percent of independents said the risks were greater than possible revenue, while a plurality of Republicans -- 42 percent -- said revenue possibilities outweighed risks.