

Poll: New Yorkers favor legalizing medical marijuana

July 13 2010, By George Lowery

(PhysOrg.com) -- The newest Empire State Poll finds New York state residents support legalizing medical marijuana and are leery of gas drilling.

Two thirds (64 percent) of New Yorkers favor legalizing medical marijuana. More than half are leery of natural gas drilling in the state, according to the 2010 Empire State Poll from Cornell's Survey Research Institute.

Between Feb. 1 and March 29, 800 New York residents were interviewed by telephone about whether they support or oppose medical marijuana or gas drilling in the state.

New Yorkers' responses to legalizing medical marijuana showed little variance between upstate and downstate residents. More Democrats and Independents favor legalization, as do men (67 percent), whites (66 percent) and people with higher incomes. Only those who described themselves as conservative took a majority position against legalization (49 percent).

The medical marijuana debate hinges on whether it can be reclassified by the federal government from a Schedule I drug (no accepted medical use, high potential for abuse, no circumstances under which medically supervised use is safe) to a Schedule II drug (high potential for abuse, some accepted medical use, abuse will lead to physical or psychological dependence; this category includes crack and Ritalin), said Emily G.

Owens, assistant professor of policy analysis and management, who commented on the survey.

"Currently, 14 states and the District of Columbia have some form of medical marijuana law, which generally 'legalizes' [medical marijuana](#) by allowing doctors working in state-approved programs to conduct research on potential therapeutic uses of marijuana, allowing them to prescribe marijuana and discuss the potential medical benefits of the drug with their patients; or allowing patients with a medical need to possess the drug," Owens said.

States that classify marijuana as Schedule II have different laws about who can receive a prescription and how prescribed marijuana can be legally acquired. "The federal classification of marijuana as a Schedule I drug hamstrings state laws," Owens said. "State-approved labs [to grow the plant] still need to meet federal standards, physicians still need to receive licenses from the federal (not state) government to prescribe drugs. And the federal government appears to be far from ready to reclassify marijuana as a Schedule II drug. However, it is possible that as more and more states pass such laws, congressional representatives from those states might have some incentive to change the federal policy."

The poll's second question asked which of the following statements best reflects your opinion about natural gas drilling in New York state?

- 1) The revenues that would come to New York state from natural gas drilling outweigh any risk of contaminating the drinking water.
- 2) The risk of contaminating the drinking water outweighs any revenues that would come to New York state from natural gas drilling.
- 3) Do not know enough about the natural gas drilling issue.

More than half of state residents said contamination risk outweighs potential revenues -- an opinion held more strongly by people living in the nine counties in and around New York City (59 percent) than upstaters (43 percent). More women (57 percent) than men (49 percent) also said the risk wasn't worth it.

Thirty-two percent of people in households with more than \$100,000 in income said the risk to drinking water was worth potential revenue, and a quarter of all those polled agreed. Most non-white respondents (65 percent) said risk outweighs revenues.

"This issue has been very polarizing in many communities, and there is still active research on many aspects of Marcellus shale drilling," said Trisha Smrecak of the Cornell-affiliated Paleontological Research Institution.

More information: Read more about the poll and methodology at sri.cornell.edu/sri/esp.reports.cfm

Provided by Cornell University

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