



WESTERN NEW YORK ANGST TURNS TO ANGER

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THE NEW YORK MATTERS PROJECT

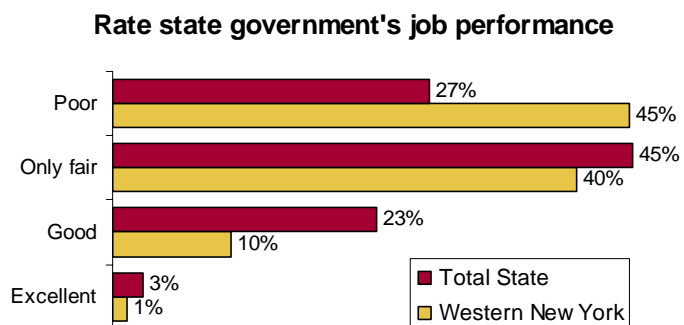
New York Matters aims to stimulate debate during this gubernatorial election year, not about personality or party politics, but about issues. Voters become engaged only if their issues are central to campaigns. So New York Matters commissioned a statewide poll to identify the top concerns of the electorate. The nearly 2,500 residents interviewed statewide gave us a complicated and thoughtful picture of their desires for the state. They told us they were concerned about taxes and the economy, but they also value a quality education above other priorities. They are disappointed in the job that state government is doing on the issues that matter most, and **they are more upset about how tax money is spent than how much is collected.** They don't want state taxes raised to address the Campaign for Fiscal Equity court decision requiring more funding for New York City schools, but **they endorsed redistributing funds from richer to poorer schools** (for full poll results, see www.NewYorkMatters.org.)



A statewide public opinion survey is in some ways incomplete in a state as diverse as New York. That's why the New York Matters poll interviewed extra residents in seven regions in order to measure opinion within the very different parts of the state. The poll results illustrate and quantify these differences, **showing how taxes are the top concern of those living on Long Island, how educational challenges are the focus of New York City and how economic woes are dominating Western New York.**

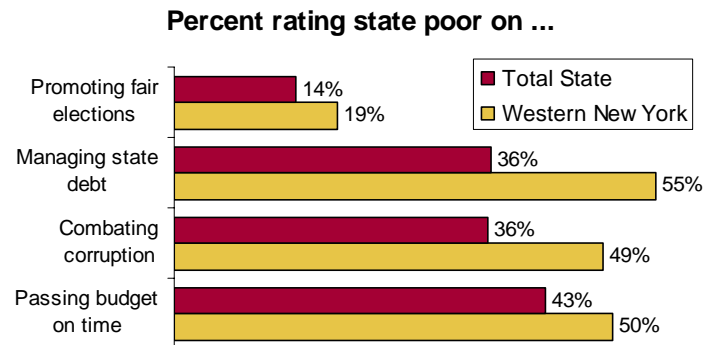
REGIONAL FOCUS – ANGST TURNS TO ANGER

Careful observers of government in New York look to the Western part of the state with concern and dread, wondering if its woes represent the future of the rest of the state. Government in this part of the state has hit an unprecedented fiscal bottom, with both the city of Buffalo and Erie County under fiscal control boards appointed by the state to save them from financial ruin. Erie County made national headlines in 2005 not only for laying off 1,500 workers, cutting hours at the



Buffalo Zoo and reducing sheriff patrols, but also for running out of toilet paper as supplies ran short in county offices. In additional to the financial struggles of local government, job losses and the burden of state and local taxes weigh heavily on this part of the state.

All these concerns come through clearly in the New York Matters poll. But they add up to more than the sum of their parts. More than any other region of the state, Western New York is fed up with government. This is saying a lot, for the state as a whole registered strong dissatisfaction with the job government is doing to address the issues that matter most. Seventy-two percent of state residents gave government ratings of “poor” or “only fair,” but 85 percent of Western New York residents did.



And while most of the state seems to think government isn’t doing well but hasn’t gotten noticeably worse in the last five years, more Western New Yorkers think government is going downhill. Thirty percent said state government’s performance has gotten worse over the past five years, compared to 17 percent of residents statewide with this opinion. Just 4 percent of Western New Yorkers said it had improved (that number was 13 percent statewide).

Western New Yorkers are particularly critical of the state’s efforts in two areas: debt and corruption. Fifty-five percent gave the state the lowest possible rating (poor) for managing state debt, and 49 percent chose that low rating for keeping government free of corruption. Statewide, both figures were 36 percent.

Where the Candidates Stand

“Reform” was the battle cry of the 2004 legislative elections in New York. It remains a hot topic in this year’s governor’s race. Democrat Eliot Spitzer has called for changes to make incumbent legislators more responsive to voters, including a nonpartisan redistricting process that would (presumably) create more competitive election districts and campaign finance reform up to and including public financing of campaigns, which some see as the best way to reduce the influence of money in politics. He also supports amending the state constitution to limit the amount of debt the state can take on. (New York has the third highest level of debt per capita in the nation.)

The Democrat challenging Spitzer, Nassau County Executive Tom Suozzi, calls for similar changes: nonpartisan redistricting, lower limits on campaign contributions, and easing the rules

to make it easier for challengers to get on elections ballots. Republican John Faso has focused more on issues of taxes and government spending than on process reforms but does support “changing the way Albany operates,” according to his campaign web site.

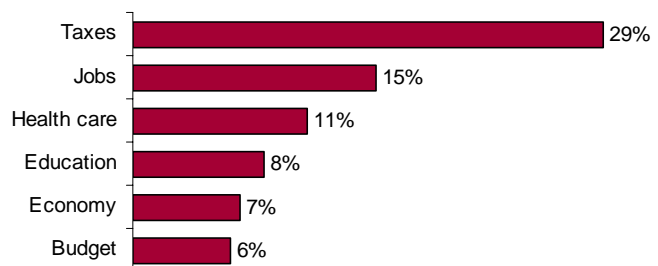
It’s certainly heartening to see all three of the major candidates talking about making major changes in state government. But while some specific proposals have been advanced, much of the debate has focused on who would be the better reformer. Spitzer points to his track record ferreting out corruption and forcing changes on Wall Street. Suozzi highlights his experience turning around Nassau County and fighting incumbents in Albany. Faso points to his background as Republican leader in the Democrat-dominated state Assembly challenging the status quo. What needs more discussion is exactly how each candidate would turn Albany around.

The Capitol functions the way it does now because the status quo works for many people, for incumbent legislators who need votes and campaign cash, for lobbyists who need legislation, for special interests that want their agendas enacted and for all the high-ranking officials making policy and sometimes cashing in on their influence and power. No single reform will wipe out a culture that has developed over decades, and fundamental changes will be resisted by all who benefit under the current system. To be convincing, candidates for governor need to get more specific about how they will achieve their aims of making state government more responsive to voters and how they will overcome the many barriers sure to arise before them. For example, how will Spitzer or Suozzi convince the Legislature to adopt campaign-finance reforms that make it harder for legislators to raise money for campaigns? How will either of them achieve redistricting reform in the next term, considering the process of redrawing districts won’t begin until after the 2010 census?

VOTER PRIORITIES

Western New Yorkers are clearly unhappy with state government in general, but certain areas are particularly troubling, namely, taxes and the economy. Compared to other parts of the state, Western New Yorkers less frequently mentioned education as the greatest issue

Greatest issue facing NYS



facing New York State that a governor could influence (8 percent, compared to 19 percent statewide). But when asked to weigh education against other issues, a higher proportion chose providing a quality education to all children as the state’s top priority (18 percent). Still, 29 percent chose answers related to cutting taxes as the number one job.

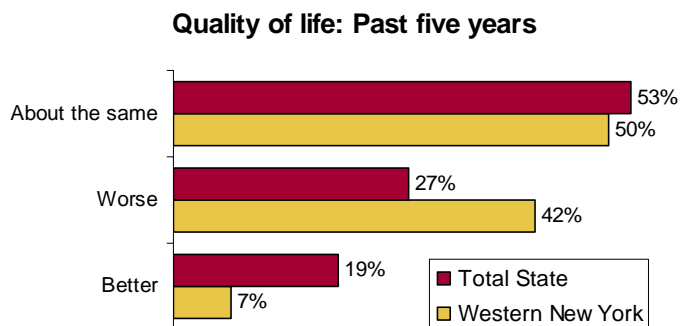
For nearly half of Western New Yorkers, reducing taxes is the most important thing state leaders can do in the next state budget. Forty-eight percent picked that over reducing state debt or maintaining programs and services. Statewide, the figures were closer, with 39 percent choosing tax reduction, 38 percent choosing programs and 23 percent choosing debt reduction.

Like all New Yorkers, Western New Yorkers as a group are more upset by how tax money is spent than how much is collected in taxes. Seventy-three percent chose that response. Thirty-four percent said cutting state taxes is always a good idea (higher than the 22 percent who said that statewide) and 38 percent said it is often a good idea.

Quality of Life

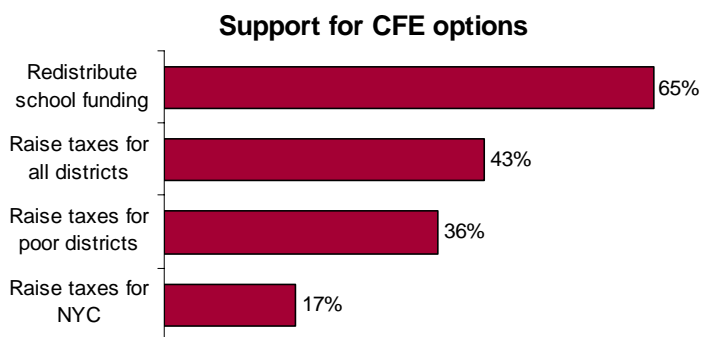
More than other New Yorkers, Western New Yorkers feel their quality of life has declined over the past five years. Half said it hasn't changed much, but a sizeable minority believes it's gotten worse.

Taxes again are highlighted. Asked about the environment, safety, traffic and taxes, far more Western New Yorkers rated the state poorly on keeping taxes low (61 percent) than on managing the other areas.



Education

Western New Yorkers feel about the same as the rest of the state on educational issues covered in the poll, which is to say, rather critical of the state's performance. Sixty-four percent said the state is doing only fair or poor on providing a quality education to all children, 70 percent gave negative ratings on holding local schools accountable and 82 percent were critical of the state's job of keeping property taxes low.



Not surprisingly, Western New Yorkers do not want to see taxes raised to settle the school-funding lawsuit filed by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Residents of this region, like those across the state, said they would prefer if spending was held level and funding was shifted from richer to poorer districts to meet the court mandate that billions more be pumped into New York City schools.

Health Care

Western New Yorkers are most concerned about the affordability of health care, with 52 percent choosing that as a priority above helping the uninsured get health care (26 percent), providing high quality care (10 percent) and increasing access to medical care (9 percent). This preference mirrored the statewide results. Residents of the region generally rated the state poor or only fair in these areas, particularly keeping health care affordable, for which 82 percent of Western New Yorkers gave the state negative marks.

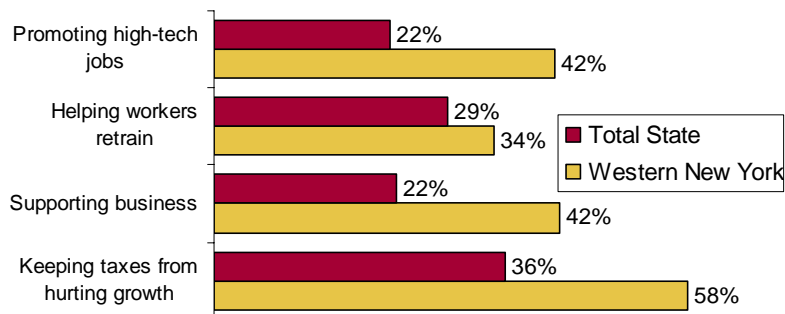
Economy

Much of the discontent in Western New York stems from its economic position.

Like Rochester and Syracuse, Buffalo has struggled since 1990 to hold on the jobs it has (not to speak of adding jobs). The metropolitan area ended 2005 with a slight decline in private-sector jobs

compared to 1990, down almost 9,000 jobs or 2 percent of the total.*

Percent rating state poor on ...



Reflecting this reality, 69 percent of Western New Yorkers said the economy has gotten worse over the past five years. That compares to 40 percent of residents across the state who felt that way. Residents of the region don't seem to think state government has done much to help them. More than residents of other regions, Western New Yorkers negatively rate the state's performance in helping workers retrain, supporting businesses, promoting high-tech jobs and preventing taxes from impeding economic growth.

* CGR analysis of U.S. Labor Department statistics.

POLL RESULTS

Overall job performance of NYS government		
	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	1.2	2.7
Good	10.2	22.8
Only fair	40.2	45
Poor	44.8	27.4
Unsure	3.6	2.1
Greatest issue facing NYS that a governor can do something about		
	WNY Percent	State Percent
Abortion	0.2	0.2
Budget	6.1	3.5
Child care		0.1
Cost of living	0.2	1.4
Crime	3.3	4.8
Death penalty		0.1
Economy	6.7	3
Education	8.2	18.7
Elderly-Senior citizens	1	0.4
Energy	0.3	1.2
Environment	0.2	1.9
Gay rights-Gay marriage		0.2
Health Care	10.9	8
Housing	0.6	4.3
Immigration	0.2	3.4
Jobs	15.2	10
Mental health issues	0.2	0.2
Middle class issues		0.2
Native American issues	1.5	0.4
Non-Profits: Funding	0.3	0.1
Population	2.2	0.3
Poverty	1.1	1
Quality of life		0.3
Racism-Race Relations		0.3
Religion	0.7	0.2
Security-Defense-Terrorism		2.8
State government issues	1.7	1.4
Stem cell research		0.1
Taxes	29.4	19.7
Transportation	0.4	2.5
War in Iraq	0.3	1.1
Welfare	1.2	0.5
Other	2.7	1.9
Unsure	5.2	6

The study was conducted by the Marist Institute of Public Opinion, a survey research center at Marist College in Poughkeepsie. The study interviewed 2,492 New York State residents, including the statewide benchmark of 850 residents. The statewide benchmark has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

The Western New York results are based on interviews with 362 residents in Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie and Niagara counties. The margin of error is plus or minus 5.5 percentage points.

Numbers may not add to exactly 100 percent due to rounding.

Full poll results may be viewed at www.NewYorkMatters.org.

VOTER PRIORITIES

A representative sample of New York State residents 18 years of age and older was drawn from throughout the state in proportion to the adult population in each county including New York City; additional interviews were conducted in six other regions of the state to achieve a sample

Most important priority for New York State government

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Protecting the environment	1.7	3.7
Keeping us safe	4	13
Keeping taxes low	12.3	5.8
Keeping property taxes low	4.4	5.6
Providing quality education for all children	17.9	24.2
Holding local schools accountable	0.3	1.2
Ensuring public schools are safe	4	4.1
Providing high quality health care	0.9	1
Keeping health care affordable	8.5	9
Helping the uninsured get health care	6.8	7
Increasing access to medical care	1.1	2.3
Keeping taxes from hurting economic growth	12.9	5.9
Supporting new and existing businesses	5.9	2.5
Helping workers retrain	2.4	1.7
Promoting high technology jobs	0.9	1.5
Passing the state budget on time	1	0.9
Keeping state government free of corruption	8.3	5.2
Managing state debt	4.1	2.6
Promoting fair and open elections	0.5	1.1
Managing transportation and traffic		0.7
Unsure	1.9	1

large enough to identify the priorities important to each of those regions. The results obtained from a scientific probability survey are not just answers from those individuals who responded but more importantly, because of the design and methods by which the data is collected, can be used to generalize to the population as a whole. For this survey, the results are an estimate of what would have been obtained, within a certain range, if all adult residents within New York State or the Western New York region were interviewed.

Quality of Life

Job NYS government is doing: Protecting the environment

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	2.3	3.7
Good	32.2	28.5
Only fair	30.3	38.6
Poor	31	27.1
Unsure	4.2	2

Job NYS government is doing: Keeping us safe

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	5.2	7
Good	43.9	49.5
Only fair	34.3	29.9
Poor	14.3	13
Unsure	2.2	0.6

Job NYS government is doing: Keeping taxes low

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	1.2	1.4
Good	8.6	13.2
Only fair	27.9	38
Poor	60.9	44.7
Unsure	1.4	2.8

Job NYS government is doing: Managing transportation and traffic

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	4.6	5.6
Good	39.3	37.3
Only fair	36.7	35.4
Poor	16.4	19.9
Unsure	3.1	1.7

Quality of life: Top priority for New York State government

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Protecting the environment	16.8	19
Keeping us safe	28.5	44.3
Keeping taxes low	49.4	29.6
Managing transportation and traffic	3	5.1
Other	1.3	0.6
Unsure	1	1.4

Quality of life: Past five years

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Better	6.6	19.1
Worse	41.9	27.2
About the same	50.4	52.9
Unsure	1.1	0.7

Education

Job NYS government is doing: Keeping property taxes low

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	0.5	1.6
Good	15.1	13.8
Only fair	27.7	34.3
Poor	54.4	43.8
Unsure	2.3	6.4

Job NYS government is doing: Providing quality education for all children

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	4.7	5.7
Good	29.6	27.9
Only fair	36.2	35.9
Poor	27.4	29.7
Unsure	2	0.8

Job NYS government is doing: Holding local schools accountable

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	2.3	2.1
Good	23.3	22.6
Only fair	43.6	41.9
Poor	26.5	26.6
Unsure	4.3	6.8

Job NYS government is doing: Ensuring public schools are safe

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	3.4	3.7
Good	34.6	31.7
Only fair	35.8	38.5
Poor	23.7	23.4
Unsure	2.5	2.7

Public Education: Top priority for New York State government

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Keeping property taxes low	19.8	18.9
Providing quality education for all children	53.3	58.3
Holding local schools accountable	10	7
Ensuring public schools are safe	15.2	14.4
Unsure	1.7	0.9

Public Education in NYS: Past five years

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Better	19	23.5
Worse	30.5	27.3
About the same	46.9	45.2
Unsure	3.6	3.9

Campaign for Fiscal Equity

CFE option: Increase state taxes to spend on
NYC schools

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Strongly favor	2.8	10.7
Favor	14.6	31.5
Oppose	47.5	37.9
Strongly oppose	31.8	17.8
Unsure	3.3	2

CFE option: Increase state taxes to spend on
NYC and poor districts

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Strongly favor	5.7	13.6
Favor	30.6	39.3
Oppose	40.6	33.6
Strongly oppose	21.1	11.4
Unsure	2	2.1

CFE option: Increase state taxes to spend on
all school districts

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Strongly favor	7.5	9.9
Favor	35	41.3
Oppose	43.7	38.1
Strongly oppose	12.3	9.1
Unsure	1.5	1.6

CFE option: Keep state spending level, shift
money from rich to poor districts

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Strongly favor	19.2	22.9
Favor	45.8	45.8
Oppose	27.7	24.1
Strongly oppose	3.7	5.4
Unsure	3.7	1.9

Health Care

Job NYS government is doing: Providing high quality health care

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	4.1	4.4
Good	31.7	26.9
Only fair	37.6	37.5
Poor	22.5	27.8
Unsure	4.1	3.4

Job NYS government is doing: Keeping health care affordable

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	2.2	3.2
Good	13.7	15.9
Only fair	34.3	34
Poor	47.4	45.1
Unsure	2.4	1.8

Job NYS government is doing: Helping the uninsured get health care

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	4.5	4.5
Good	20.6	22.3
Only fair	30	31.9
Poor	36.3	35.7
Unsure	8.6	5.7

Job NYS government is doing: Increasing access to medical care

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	3	4.9
Good	30.3	23.9
Only fair	37.3	38.7
Poor	25.2	28.5
Unsure	4.2	3.9

Health care: Top priority for New York State government

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Providing high quality health care	10	10.6
Keeping health care affordable	52	46.1
Helping the uninsured get health care	26.1	28.4
Increasing access to medical care	9.2	13.7
Other	0.9	0.3
Unsure	1.8	0.9

Health care in NYS: Past five years

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Better	15.6	18.8
Worse	30.9	29.6
About the same	48.9	48.9
Unsure	4.6	2.7

Economy

Job NYS government is doing: Keeping taxes from hurting economic growth

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	2.6	2.2
Good	5.6	14
Only fair	29.4	44.2
Poor	57.8	35.5
Unsure	4.5	4.1

Job NYS government is doing: Supporting new and existing businesses

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	0.8	2.4
Good	13.6	25.2
Only fair	39.6	45.3
Poor	42.2	22.2
Unsure	3.9	4.9

Job NYS government is doing: Helping workers retrain

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	1.2	3
Good	13.4	20.5
Only fair	40.6	39.2
Poor	34.3	28.5
Unsure	10.4	8.8

Job NYS government is doing: Promoting high technology jobs

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	1.3	3.8
Good	14.5	23.9
Only fair	36.5	43
Poor	41.7	21.6
Unsure	6	7.8

Economy: Top priority for New York State government

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Keeping taxes from hurting economic growth	40.1	38.6
Supporting new and existing businesses	26.5	25
Helping workers retrain	20.6	25.9
Promoting high technology jobs	11.1	9.4
Other	0.2	
Unsure	1.6	1.1

Economy in NYS: Past five years

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Better	3.5	17.8
Worse	69	40.3
About the same	27.1	40.9
Unsure	0.4	0.9

State Government

Job NYS government is doing: Passing the state budget on time

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	1.3	2.3
Good	18.3	16.1
Only fair	28.1	33.1
Poor	50.1	42.5
Unsure	2.3	6.1

Job NYS government is doing: Keeping state government free of corruption

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	0.9	2.9
Good	11.5	18.6
Only fair	34.6	39.6
Poor	49.1	35.9
Unsure	4	3

Job NYS government is doing: Managing state debt

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	0.5	1.1
Good	5.3	13
Only fair	37	44.4
Poor	55.1	36.2
Unsure	2.2	5.3

Job NYS government is doing: Promoting fair and open elections

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Excellent	2.3	7.6
Good	46.8	43
Only fair	31.2	33.8
Poor	18.6	13.9
Unsure	1.1	1.8

How state government works: Top priority for New York State government

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Passing the state budget on time	10.3	12.1
Keeping state government free of corruption	46	47.1
Managing state debt	35.5	28.5
Promoting fair and open elections	7.3	10.7
Unsure	0.9	1.5

How NYS state government works: Past five years

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Better	4.1	12.6
Worse	30.3	17.3
About the same	64.3	69.3
Unsure	1.2	0.8

Budget and Taxes

Highest priority of the next New York state budget

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Reduce the state debt	27.8	22.8
Reduce state taxes	48.1	38.6
Maintain programs and services	22.8	37.9
Unsure	1.3	0.7

Do you think reducing New York State taxes is a good idea?

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Always	34.3	22.4
Often	37.7	37.7
Seldom	23.8	34.3
Never	3.1	4.3
Unsure	1	1.3

Concerned reducing NYS taxes will increase local taxes?

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Great deal	39.3	31.7
Good amount	28.2	28.8
Not very much	18.7	22.7
Not at all	11.5	14.7
Unsure	2.4	2.2

Concerned reducing NYS taxes will increase the state's debt?

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Great deal	29.2	24.8
Good amount	31.4	29.9
Not very much	22	26.6
Not at all	14.2	15.7
Unsure	3.2	2.9

Concerned reducing NYS taxes will cause cuts in programs and services?

	WNY Percent	State Percent
Great deal	28.4	31.9
Good amount	29.2	29.5
Not very much	23.2	23.6
Not at all	13.6	12.9
Unsure	5.6	2

When it comes to paying New York State taxes, which bothers you more?

	WNY Percent	State Percent
How much you pay in taxes	24.1	31.1
How state government spends your taxes	73.4	67.9
Unsure	2.6	1