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THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF COMMUNITY AND THE ECONOMY

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New Lycoming College Poll Gauges Opinion on Marcellus Shale Development

WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. – According to results of a Lycoming College poll released today, public opinion is largely supportive of the development of Marcellus Shale in the region, but there is some concern about possible negative consequences. Fifty percent of respondents indicated that the development of Marcellus Shale would be beneficial to their community, compared to 28 percent who felt its effects would be detrimental and 22 percent who did not have an opinion. In total, 79 percent of respondents indicated they followed news about Marcellus Shale somewhat or very closely.

“Marcellus has made big news in the region. We polled likely voters in the 10th congressional district, which largely overlaps with the Marcellus region in northeast Pennsylvania,” said Dr. Jonathan Williamson, chair of the Department of Political Science at Lycoming and director of the College’s Center for the Study of Community and the Economy (CSCE). “Respondents were relatively knowledgeable about the issue and more supportive of the development of natural gas than not.”

Political science students, under the direction of Williamson, surveyed 370 likely voters from Sept. 26-30 in the 10th congressional district, which extends from Williamsport in the west to sections of Lackawanna and Luzerne counties, excluding the cities of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre. The poll’s margin of error is +/- 5.1 percent.

When offered a list of possible benefits that might result from the development of Marcellus Shale in the region, respondents were most optimistic about its potential for the creation of many new jobs for the region; in total 78 percent felt the creation of many new jobs was very likely or somewhat likely to occur. Similarly, 71 percent felt that the natural gas industry would create needed economic development in the region. Sixty-one percent agreed that natural gas development would be very likely or somewhat likely to reduce our reliance on foreign sources of energy. Fewer respondents felt that natural gas development in our region would result in lower energy costs (47 percent) or lower taxes (33 percent).

“People are most optimistic about the possibilities that Marcellus brings to their local communities,” said Williamson, “but they are more cautious when asked about the broader reaching effects.”

When asked whether drilling should be limited or the growth of the industry should be encouraged, respondents were more divided. Forty-six percent of respondents agreed with those who felt drilling should be limited because of threats to the environment, while 37 percent agreed with those who feel growth of the industry should be encouraged because the economic benefits outweigh the environmental risks. Seventeen percent of respondents remain undecided on the issue.

Among possible problems created by the growth of the natural gas industry, respondents expressed the most concern about threats to their water supply, with 57 percent indicating it was a major concern, and the damage to local roads caused by increased truck traffic, with 56 percent indicating that as a major concern. Significant minorities also indicated health risks to those living near well sites (40 percent), risks to the health and beauty of forests (33 percent), jobs not going to local workers (30 percent), and increasing prices of housing and other necessities (30 percent), as major concerns.

“Even though respondents are hopeful about the potential benefits of natural gas development,” said Williamson, “they expressed healthy reservations about the potential negative consequences as well.”

Respondents were also asked their opinion regarding legislation related to the natural gas industry currently under consideration in Harrisburg. A plurality (45 percent) supported levying a severance tax on natural gas, although 37 percent were undecided on the issue and 18 percent were opposed. A vast majority (70 percent) of respondents indicated that if a severance tax were

levied most of the money should go to local governments to pay for costs like road maintenance or public safety that are attributable to the natural gas industry, as opposed using the funds to balance the state budget deficit, an option supported by only 10 percent of respondents. The remaining respondents either did not have an opinion on the issue, felt the money should be divided between the two options, or preferred the revenue to be used in another way.

Respondents were also asked whether they favored proposed legislation that would require land owners to sign gas leases if the majority of their neighbors had done so. Only 11 percent of respondents favored such pooling legislation, while 56 percent opposed it. One third of respondents didn't know enough about the issue to express an opinion.

“The severance tax and pooling legislation has been in the news a lot in recent weeks,” said Williamson, “but a sizable share of the public still haven't learned enough about the issues to take a position. Among those that have, it is notable that most are comfortable with the idea of a severance tax, but don't want it to be absorbed into the state's general fund. The pooling legislation is unpopular likely because respondents see it as violating their rights to control their property.”

In sum, 54 percent of respondents had signed a natural gas lease or had someone in their family or someone else they knew who had done so.

How closely would you say you have followed the news on the development of the Marcellus Shale natural gas industry in Pennsylvania? Would you say you have followed the news very closely, somewhat closely or not closely at all?

Very closely	27.3%
Somewhat closely	51.5
Not closely at all	19.0
Don't Know / No Opinion	2.1

What effect do you think the development of Marcellus Shale natural gas in Pennsylvania will have on your community? Will it be very beneficial, somewhat beneficial, somewhat detrimental or very detrimental to your community?

Very beneficial	14.3%
Somewhat beneficial	35.3
Somewhat detrimental	16.8
Very detrimental	11.6
Don't Know / No Opinion	22.0

Some people say that we should limit drilling for natural gas in Pennsylvania because it threatens the environment, including our supply of drinking water, and because the economic benefits are not worth the risks. Other people say that we should encourage the growth of the natural gas industry because it provides needed jobs and economic development and because the risks to the environment are minimal. Which view falls closer to your own?

Limit drilling	46.4
Encourage growth	37.1

Don't Know / No Opinion	16.5
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Now I am going to read you a list of benefits some people have suggested will result from the development of Marcellus Shale natural gas in our region. For each potential benefit, please indicate how likely it is that that benefit will occur as a result of the development of the natural gas industry. Is it very likely to occur, somewhat likely to occur, somewhat unlikely to occur or very unlikely to occur? (Read across)

	Very likely to occur	Somewhat likely to occur	Somewhat unlikely to occur	Very unlikely to occur	Don't Know / No Opinion
The creation of many new jobs.	38.4%	39.3%	7.5%	6.8%	8.0%
The infusion of needed economic development into struggling communities	30.4	40.6	10.3	6.6	12.2
A reduced reliance on foreign sources of energy.	25.7	35.7	14.9	10.6	13.0
Lower energy costs	14.0	33.2	17.9	22.2	12.7
Lower taxes because of growing tax base	11.6	21.0	20.4	34.1	12.9

I am going to read you a list of concerns some people have about the development of Marcellus Shale natural gas in our region. For each concern, please indicate whether you believe it to be a major problem, a minor problem or not a problem at all in terms of the development of the natural gas industry in our region. (Read across)

	Major Concern	Minor Concern	Not a Concern	Don't Know
Natural gas drilling will threaten the quality of our water supply.	56.6%	26.3%	5.8%	11.3%
Trucking traffic created by the natural gas industry will damage local roads.	55.7	26.2	8.8	9.2
The health of those living near natural gas well sites will be negatively affected.	39.7	26.6	18.6	15.1
Natural gas drilling will threaten the health and beauty of our forests.	33.4	34.0	22.2	10.3
The jobs created by the natural gas industry will not go to local workers.	30.0	34.3	22.9	12.8
The growth of the natural gas industry will drive up prices of housing and other necessities.	29.5	29.6	28.5	12.4

A severance tax has been proposed that would levy a tax on natural gas companies based on the value of the gas they extract. Do you favor or oppose adoption of a severance tax on natural gas production in Pennsylvania? If you are unfamiliar with the proposed severance tax or haven't thought enough about the issue, let me know and we can move on.

Favor	44.5%
Oppose	18.0
Don't Know/No Opinion	37.4

Regardless of your position on whether Pennsylvania should adopt a severance tax, if such a tax were levied on natural gas production in the state, what should the revenue be used for? Should most of the money be used to balance the state budget deficit OR should most of the money be sent to county and local governments to pay for increased costs attributable to the natural gas industry, such as road maintenance or public safety?

Balance state budget	9.5%
Local governments for increased costs	69.6
Split between the two (volunteered)	10.7
Neither, something else (volunteered)	1.9
Don't Know/No Opinion	8.3

Legislation is under consideration in Harrisburg that would require landowners to enter into a natural gas lease if at least 75 percent of the property owners around them have chosen to do so. Do you favor or oppose such a proposal? If you are unfamiliar with the proposed pooling legislation or haven't thought enough about the issue, let me know and we can move on.

Favor	11.1%
Oppose	55.8
Don't Know / No Opinion	33.1

Have you or anyone in your family signed a lease with a natural gas company for rights to extract natural gas from land that you or someone in your family owns in Pennsylvania?

Yes	25.4%
No	69.8
Don't Know / No Opinion	4.8

Do you know someone personally, other than members of your family, that has signed a lease with a natural gas company for rights to extract natural gas from land that person owns in Pennsylvania?

Yes	52.1%
No	42.8
Don't Know / No Opinion	5.2

Background

Center for the Study of Community and the Economy

This survey was conducted by the Lycoming College Polling Institute, a part of the College's Center for the Study of Community and the Economy (CSCE). In operation since 2003, CSCE is a public service, applied research organization with a mission to conduct research and provide data analysis and planning on issues related to community and economic development and public policy. In addition to serving the broader needs of the center, the Polling Institute provides periodic polling information on political issues of importance to the broader community. The interdisciplinary nature of faculty and staff involved in the Center provides an unbiased and complementary approach to the study of the region the Center serves. The Center also provides students with special opportunities to work with faculty in producing original, applied research. As future leaders, students involved in the Center's activities work in a real world laboratory, honing their understanding of the challenges and opportunities they and their communities face.

Polling Methodology

The findings summarized in this release are based on a telephone survey of 370 likely voters living in the 10th Congressional District of Pennsylvania conducted between Sept. 26 and 30, 2010. The survey's margin of error for the complete sample is +/- 5.1 percent; the margin of error is larger among subgroups of respondents. Respondents were randomly selected based on voter registration lists. The final sample included 54.7 percent registered Republicans, 37.8 percent registered Democrats and 7.5 percent registered as Independents or with another party. The results were weighted to adjust for variation in the sample relating to geographic distribution, gender and age. Additional questions were asked of respondents than those released here. For information about those results, please arrange for an interview with Jonathan Williamson, Ph.D.