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Expectations for Christie are mounting

Polls are simply wonderful, aren't they?

A Rutgers-Eagleton Institute poll released Friday asked state residents what they want new governor Chris Christie to do.

Nearly half of New Jerseyans polled said they want Christie to cut taxes quickly. No surprise there. In fact, some are optimistic it's going to happen. But bear with us.

Some 27 percent of those polled said they want the new governor to cut property taxes. What's wrong with that? After all, aren't property taxes in New Jersey the highest in the nation and showing no signs of leveling off? Yes.

But here's the problem. Chris Christie can not cut property taxes. No governor can do that.

Property taxes are not levied by the state, nor does the state collect any property taxes.

Property taxes are collected and spent exclusively by local governments — towns, counties and school districts.

Now, there are things a governor can do to impact property taxes. He can push town consolidation, he can review unfunded state mandates, he can increase state aid and he can revamp the collective bargaining system for school and municipal employees. But even if some of those things are accomplished, the final call on property taxes will rest with your local town hall and school district office. In short, whatever property tax savings local officials realize must be passed along to the public.

An unfunded mandate could be removed, but if, say, a school district uses the savings to fund another program, there will be no property tax cut.

Our point here is that public expectations about what a governor can do are one thing. Understanding the admittedly confusing system of government in New Jersey is another thing.

By the way, that same poll asked residents how Christie should close a projected budget gap of \$8 billion. Most said he should cut spending. But what if he cuts programs that they like? Hmm, the poll did not ask that question.
