

# Healthcare News

EDITOR

**Humphrey Taylor**  
Chairman of *The Harris Poll*®

## Healthcare as a Political Issue in the Congressional Elections

How is healthcare playing as an issue in the Congressional elections? Two recent surveys by Harris Interactive show that health care is an important issue to a substantial minority of voters and that President Bush is given very negative marks on health care, but that only about a third of the public thinks that the Democrats would do a better job than the Republicans at handling eight important healthcare issues. We do not believe that many votes will be won or lost on healthcare issues.

This research also shows that the healthcare issues that the largest percentages of people see as most important are the uninsured, improving Medicare and containing out-of-pocket costs, but many people do not see any differences between the parties on ability to handle these issues.

6 | Volume

7 | Issue

October 31

2006

## President Bush's ratings on his handling of healthcare

The first of these two surveys was a Harris Poll of 1,571 likely voters (i.e., registered voters who say they are very or somewhat likely to vote) surveyed online by Harris Interactive between October 4 and 10, 2006.

It found that among likely voters, the President received 64 percent to 31 percent negative ratings on his handling of healthcare, and that his ratings on healthcare were worse than for his handling of nine other issues, including Iraq, taxes and the economy.

**TABLE 1**  
**President Bush Receives Two-To-One Disapproval on Healthcare Among Likely Voters**  
"How much do you approve or disapprove of President Bush and his administration's handling on the following issues?"

Base: Likely Voters

	%	Likely Voters		
		Approve (Net)	Disapprove (Net)	Net (Positive minus Negative)
Keeping America safer	%	48	50	-2
Protecting traditional values	%	45	51	-6
Appointments to the Supreme Court	%	45	48	-3
War on terror	%	42	57	-15
Environmental policies	%	38	56	-18
Economic policies	%	38	58	-20
Hurricane relief	%	36	62	-26
Tax policies	%	37	58	-21
Iraq	%	35	64	-29
Energy policies	%	31	63	-32
Healthcare	%	31	64	-33

Note: Excludes "not familiar" responses

## The importance of healthcare as an issue

When asked to choose two from this list of 11 issues that would have the “largest impact on your decision of whom to vote for,” more than a quarter (29%) chose healthcare, which tied the top of the list with “keeping America safer”. However, many more people, in aggregate, chose one of three related issues – keeping America safer (29%), the war on terror (28%), and Iraq (27%) – than mentioned healthcare.

Nevertheless, it is striking that healthcare was mentioned more often than the economy (24%), taxes (19%), protecting traditional values (13%) and energy (10%).

**Table 2**  
**More Than a Quarter of Likely Voters See Healthcare As One of Two Most Important Issues in These Elections**

“Thinking about the upcoming Congressional elections, which two of these have the largest impact on your decision of whom to vote for?”

Base: Likely Voters

	%	President Bush's rating (approve minus disapprove) from Table 1
<b>Healthcare</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>-33</b>
Keeping America safer	29	-2
War on terror	28	-15
Iraq	27	-29
Economic policies	24	-20
Tax policies	19	-21
Protecting traditional values	13	-6
Energy policies	10	-32
Environmental policies	8	-18
Appointments to the Supreme Court	5	-3
Hurricane relief	3	-26

# Healthcare News

The second survey by Harris Interactive – a Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Healthcare Poll – included a different question on the importance of healthcare as an issue. This was also an online survey conducted among a nationwide sample of 2,384 adults aged 18 and over (not just among likely voters) between October 16 and 18, 2006.

This survey found that 14 percent of all adults feel that healthcare will be the most important issue for them in the November 7th elections, and this included 17 percent of Democrats but fewer Republicans (11%) and Independents (13%).

However, only 19 percent of all adults said that healthcare was not an important issue for them and fully 54 percent said that, while less important than other issues, it was important.

**Table 3**  
**Fourteen Percent of Adults Think Healthcare Is the Most Important Issue**  
“Which of the following statements best describes your views about the November 7 elections?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Party Affiliation		
		Republican	Democrat	Independent
	%	%	%	%
<b>Healthcare Is an Important Issue (Net)</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>69</b>
Healthcare will be the most important issue to me	14	11	17	13
Healthcare will be an important issue to me, but less important than other issues	54	55	64	57
Healthcare will not be a very important issue to me in the election	19	29	12	24
I do not plan to vote on November 7 <sup>th</sup>	13	5	7	7

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

## The relative importance of eight different healthcare issues

When shown a list of eight different healthcare issues and asked to choose two which they think are “most important for the government to address over the next two years,” a substantial plurality (42%) picked reducing the number of people without insurance. Second on the list is improving Medicare (28%), which could include anything from improving the new drug benefit to securing the long-term financial security of the program. The next three items all related to containing out-of-pocket costs, for medical services (26%), for premiums (19%) and for prescription drugs (15%).

**Table 4**  
**The Uninsured, Medicare and Out-Of-Pocket Costs Seen As Most Important Healthcare Issues for Government to Address Over Next Two Years**

“Which two of these do you think are the most important issues for government to address over the next two years?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Party Affiliation		
		Republican	Democrat	Independent
	%	%	%	%
Reducing the percentage of Americans without health insurance	42	33	51	46
Improving Medicare, the government health insurance program for the elderly and people with disabilities	28	28	32	26
Containing people’s out-of-pocket costs for healthcare services, such as doctors’ visits, diagnostic tests and hospital fees	26	26	29	27
Containing workers’ and retiree’s out-of-pocket costs for health insurance premiums	19	23	16	24
Containing people’s out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs	15	20	15	12
Allowing for the importation of less expensive prescription drugs from other countries	14	13	14	21
Improving Medicaid, the government health insurance programs for lower income people	13	9	17	10
Ensuring the safety of prescription drugs	11	14	7	13
None of these	8	10	4	6
Not sure	7	6	5	4

## Party political advantage

Given the President's 64 percent negative rating on healthcare, and the relative importance of the issue, it would not have been surprising to see healthcare as a big vote winner for the Democrats. However, this is not the case. When asked which political party is likely to do a better job handling these eight healthcare issues, less than 40 percent of adults prefer the Democrats on any of them, and more than 50 percent see no differences between the parties or are not sure.

It is true that Democrats are preferred over Republicans by about three-to-one on most of these issues, but few Republicans feel this way. Even among Democrats, only between 52 percent and 66 percent think the Democrats would do better. As for Independents, between 24 percent to 43 percent think the Democrats would do better.

*Healthcare appears to be an issue which the Democrats have failed to use effectively in these elections.*

**Table 5**  
**Most People See No Difference or Are Not Sure About Which Party Would Do a Better Job on Eight Issues**

"Which political party do you think is likely to do a better job handling the following components of the U.S. healthcare system after the elections on November 7th?"

Base: All Adults

		Who Is Better?		No Difference	Not Sure
		Republicans	Democrats		
<b>Improving Medicare, the government health insurance program for the elderly and people with disabilities</b>					
All Adults	%	36	11	30	22
Party Affiliation:					
Republican	%	10	35	35	21
Democrat	%	66	1	20	13
Independent	%	39	7	36	18
<b>Improving Medicaid, the government health insurance program for lower income people</b>					
All Adults	%	38	10	30	22
Party Affiliation:					
Republican	%	12	32	36	19
Democrat	%	66	2	18	14
Independent	%	43	4	34	19
<b>Containing people's out-of-pocket costs for healthcare services, such as doctors' visits, diagnostic tests and hospital fees</b>					
All Adults	%	32	11	34	23
Party Affiliation:					
Republican	%	9	34	38	19
Democrat	%	59	2	23	16
Independent	%	31	6	44	19

continued next page

		Who Is Better?		No Difference	Not Sure
		Democrats	Republicans		
<b>Allowing for the importation of less expensive prescription drugs from other countries</b>					
All Adults	%	34	11	29	26
Party Affiliation:					
Republican	%	14	29	35	22
Democrat	%	59	3	19	18
Independent	%	38	6	34	22
<b>Ensuring the safety of prescription drugs</b>					
All Adults	%	25	12	38	25
Party Affiliation:					
Republican	%	4	37	38	20
Democrat	%	52	2	30	16
Independent	%	24	5	48	23
<b>Containing workers' and retiree's out-of-pocket costs for health insurance premiums</b>					
All Adults	%	31	12	33	24
Party Affiliation:					
Republican	%	9	34	38	19
Democrat	%	57	3	24	16
Independent	%	35	8	38	20
<b>Containing people's out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs</b>					
All Adults	%	32	11	34	23
Party Affiliation:					
Republican	%	8	36	38	19
Democrat	%	60	1	24	14
Independent	%	35	5	40	20
<b>Reducing the percentage of Americans without health insurance</b>					
All Adults	%	37	11	31	22
Party Affiliation:					
Republican	%	10	32	39	19
Democrat	%	65	2	19	14
Independent	%	42	5	35	18

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

## Methodology

One Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between October 4 and 10, 2006 among 1,571 likely voters. Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

The other Harris Poll for the Wall Street Journal Online was conducted online within the United States between October 16 and 18, 2006 among 2,384 adults. Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite "margin of error" for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With pure probability samples of 2,384 adults or 1,571 likely voters one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/- two or three percentage points. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

# Healthcare News

6 | Volume  
7 | Issue  
**October 31**  
2006

## About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is the 12<sup>th</sup> largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world. The company provides research-driven insights and strategic advice to help its clients make more confident decisions which lead to measurable and enduring improvements in performance. Harris Interactive is widely known for *The Harris Poll*<sup>®</sup>, one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. The company has built what could conceivably be the world's largest panel of survey respondents, the Harris Poll Online<sup>SM</sup>. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its United States, Europe and Asia offices, its wholly-owned subsidiary Novatris in France and through a global network of independent market research firms. The service bureau, HISB, provides its market research industry clients with mixed-mode data collection, panel development services as well as syndicated and tracking research consultation. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at [www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com).

*To become a member of the Harris Poll Online and be invited to participate in online surveys, register at <http://go.hpolsurveys.com/Health>.*

---

## To Subscribe

Please visit [www.harrisinteractive.com/newsletters](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/newsletters)

## To Unsubscribe

Please send an email to [newsletters@harrisinteractive.net](mailto:newsletters@harrisinteractive.net) or simply click on the "One-Click Unsubscribe" link in the footer of the email you received with this newsletter.

For more information, please contact us at:

**877.919.4765**

or visit our healthcare webpage at

[www.harrisinteractive.com/healthcare](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/healthcare)

### Media inquiries, contact:

Jennifer Cummings 585.214.7720

[jcumings@harrisinteractive.com](mailto:jcumings@harrisinteractive.com)

©2006, Harris Interactive Inc. All rights reserved.  
Other product and/or company names used herein  
are trademarks of their respective owners.