

Humphrey Taylor  
Chairman of *The Harris Poll*®



AHEAD OF WHAT'S NEXT.

## Recent Harris Polls Show Increased Opposition to Obama's Health Care Reform Proposals But Majority Support the "Public Option"

Two recent Harris Polls provide new information on public attitudes to President Obama's health care reform proposals. However, both of these were conducted before President Obama's press conference on July 22<sup>nd</sup> in which he made an eloquent plea for public support and which may have influenced public opinion after these two surveys were conducted.

### The More People Think They Know about Obama's Health Care Reform Proposals the More They Oppose Them

In late January 2009, only 17% of the public claimed to know much about President Obama's health care reform proposals. By late July, just before the president's press conference on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, that number had more than doubled, to 36%, while fully 72% felt they knew "a lot" or "some." The full importance of this question is that how much people feel they know about the president's proposals are strongly correlated with opposition to them.

These are the results of a Harris Poll of 2,029 adults surveyed online between July 20 and 22, 2009.

**Table 1**  
**Seen, Heard or Read About Obama's Health Reform Proposals**

*"How much have you seen, heard or read about possible health care reforms that are likely to be proposed by President Barack Obama?"*

Base: All Adults

	January	July
	%	%
<b>Know at lot or some (NET)</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>72</b>
A lot	17	36
Some	34	36
A little	25	18
I don't know anything about President Obama's proposals for health care reform.	21	10

This survey also repeated another question that we asked in January to measure support and opposition to the president’s health reform proposals. In January, a 50% to 20% plurality supported them (while in most cases admitting that they did not know a lot about them). In our late July survey the public was almost equally divided, with only a slender 42% to 38% plurality supporting the president’s proposals.

**Table 2**  
**Support or Oppose Obama’s Reform Proposals**

*“Even if you don’t know the details of his plan, how do you feel about President Obama’s proposals for health care reforms?”*

Base: All Adults

	January	July
	%	%
<b>Support (NET)</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>42</b>
Support strongly	25	20
Support somewhat	26	21
<b>Oppose (NET)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>38</b>
Oppose somewhat	9	12
Oppose strongly	12	27
Not sure	29	20

However, the really bad news for President Obama and the Democrats is that opposition to his proposals increases from 22% of those who feel they know only a little about them to a 54% majority of those who feel they know a lot. Only 42% of these “well informed” people support the plan.

**Table 3**  
**Support or Oppose Obama’s Health Proposals – By How Much Seen/Heard or Read About Them**

*“How much have you seen, heard or read about possible health care reforms that are likely to be proposed by President Barack Obama?”*

Base: All Adults

	Total	A Lot	Know Some	A Little	Nothing
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Support (NET)</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>20</b>
Support strongly	20	27	22	11	8
Support somewhat	21	15	25	32	12
<b>Oppose (NET)</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>8</b>
Oppose somewhat	12	8	18	12	2
Oppose strongly	27	45	22	10	6
Not Sure	20	4	13	35	72

More bad news for the president comes from the results to another question on what people believe would be the impact of his plans if they were implemented. All of the changes since January show increasing numbers of people who are not convinced about the benefits of the plans.

Those who think that the plans would be “good” for each of the following have fallen:

- For the quality of medical care, from 47% to 35%;
- For “people like you” from 45% to 34%;
- For containing costs, from 49% to 39%;
- For providing more people with adequate insurance, from 61% to 52%;
- For strengthening the economy, from 42% to 30%;
- For making care more cost effective, from 54% to 42%.

The numbers who think that the president’s proposal would be “bad” for each of these six items have jumped, and in some cases, doubled. For example:

- 34% of adults now think that Obama’s proposed reform would be bad for “people like you,” compared to only 19% in January; and
- 35% believe that they would be bad for “strengthening the economy,” compared to only 19% in January.

**Table 4**  
**Obama’s Reforms Would be Good or Bad For . . .**

*“Even if you don’t know the details of his plan, do you believe that President Obama’s proposals for health care reforms, if implemented, would be good or bad for...?”*

Base: All Adults

			Good	Bad	Not Sure
The quality of medical care in America	January	%	47	20	33
	July	%	35	36	25
People like you	January	%	45	18	36
	July	%	34	34	32
Containing the cost of health care	January	%	49	18	33
	July	%	39	32	30
Providing many more people with adequate health insurance)	January	%	61	11	29
	July	%	52	22	26
Strengthening the economy	January	%	42	19	39
	July	%	30	35	35
Making health care more cost-effective	January	%	54	16	31
	July	%	42	30	27

Unsurprisingly, given all these findings, the public is divided about how important it is to pass “a major health care bill to expand health insurance coverage” in President Obama’s first year in office. Only 23% think that it is extremely or very important, 34% think it is not important, and 21% think it only somewhat important.

**Table 5**  
**How Important That Obama Pass a Major Health Insurance Bill To Expance Coverage In His First Year**

*“How important is it to you that President Obama passes a major health care bill to expand health insurance coverage in his first year in office?”*

Base: All Adults

	Total	A Lot	Know Some	A Little	Nothing
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Extremely/Very Important/ Important (NET)</b>	45	39	45	47	61
Extremely important	12	16	10	11	10
Very important	11	11	12	7	15
Important	21	12	23	30	36
Somewhat important	21	14	25	29	19
Not at all important	34	46	30	24	19

## 5-to-3 Majority Supports the Idea of a Public or Government Health Plan to Compete with Private Insurance

*Arguments in favor of a public plan somewhat more persuasive than arguments against.*

One of the hotly contested issues in the debate about health care reform is whether or not there should be a new government health plan to compete with the plans offered by insurance industry to employers and individuals. This idea is strongly supported by President Obama and most Democratic members of Congress but Republican members of Congress unanimously oppose it.

Other polls have shown that attitudes to this proposal vary depending on the language used to describe it. Supporters are now calling it a “public option.” Opponents usually call it a “government-run” plan. A recent Harris Poll tried to bridge this language gap by asking the public about the proposal of a new “public, or government-sponsored, health plan.” This poll finds that a modest 52% to 30% majority supports such a plan, and that the arguments in favor of it tend to generate more support than those against it.

These are some of the results of a Harris Poll of 2,276 U.S. adults surveyed online by Harris Interactive® between July 9 and 13, 2009.

**Table 6**  
**Support/Oppose Public/Government-Sponsored Health Plan**

*“How much do you support or oppose the proposal now being discussed to set up a public, or government-sponsored, health plan somewhat like Medicare that would compete with private health insurance plans and sell health insurance to employers and individuals who choose it?”*

Base: All Adults

	Total
	%
Support (NET)	<b>52</b>
Strongly support	24
Somewhat support	27
Oppose (NET)	30
Somewhat oppose	8
Strongly oppose	22
Not sure	18

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

In addition to the 5-to-3 majority support of the plan, the survey tested the strengths of three arguments in favor of a public, or government, plan and three against it. The three arguments in favor elicited the support of majorities between 68% and 55%:

- A 68% majority thought a public plan would be a valuable alternative to private insurance.
- A 63% majority thought that it would help to keep insurance costs down.
- A 55% majority thought it would help patients to get better care.

Arguments against a public plan generated mixed reactions:

- A 55% majority agreed it would reduce the freedom of patients to choose the doctors and treatments they want, but
- A 54% majority disagreed that it would be “too much like socialism,” and
- A 56% majority disagreed that it would drive insurance companies out of business.

**Table 7**  
**Agreement With Six Statements For And Against Public/Government Plan**

*“How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following points of view about the proposal to set up a public, or government-sponsored, health insurance plan?”*

*Summary of Strongly/Somewhat Agree*

Base: All Adults

		For	Against
<b>Arguments For:</b>			
A public plan would be valuable for employers and individuals to have an alternative to private insurance	%	68	32
The competition provided by a public plan would help to keep down the premiums and co-pays charged by private plans	%	63	37
The competition against private and public plans would result in patients receiving better care	%	55	45
<b>Arguments Against:</b>			
A public plan would reduce the freedom of patients to choose the doctors and treatments they want	%	55	45
A public plan would be too much like socialism	%	46	54
A public plan would drive private health insurance companies out of business	%	44	56

Given that health care reform is being so hotly debated and is getting a great deal of media coverage, attitudes to this proposal for a public plan are likely to change. Furthermore, it is always possible that it may change, or even be dropped, as part of a compromise to achieve a bill that can be passed with a few Republican notes in the Congress.

However, the 5-to-3 majority of the public in favor of a public plan suggests that it has the potential to help persuade some members of the public to support bills proposed by the Congress that include it.

## Methodology

Harris Interactive® conducted these online surveys within the United States between July 9 and 22, 2009 among a national cross section of 2,029 and 2,276 adults age 18 and over. Figures for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the U.S. adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate in the Harris Interactive online research panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

## About Harris Interactive

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### Press Contact:

Harris Interactive

Corporate Communications

585.272.8400

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