

Initial Reactions to Medicare Reform and Drug Benefit Bill More Negative than Positive, Especially Among Older Voters

Results of a recent Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll suggest that President Bush is going to have to work very hard to make the Medicare reform and drug benefit bill a vote winner, particularly among older voters who care most about Medicare. However, both defenders and critics will find pieces of the bill they can run on.

This poll of almost 2,500 U.S. adults nationwide was conducted online between December 3 and 5, 2003 by Harris Interactive for The Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition, which offers authoritative analysis, breaking news and commentary from top health industry journalists.

One remarkable finding here is that fully 42% of the public surveyed chose to reply to the first question saying that they didn't "know enough about the bill to have an opinion", and significant numbers of those who said they did know enough answered saying they were "not sure" to all the questions. Unlike other published polls on this topic, most of our questions were only asked of those (58%) of the public who knew "enough to have an opinion." In this context it is worth noting the ABC News poll which showed that those who knew something about the bill were more negative than those who did not.

Given how few people have deeply held convictions about this bill, a reasonable conclusion is that the political winners and losers on this bill and its many parts have still to emerge, and it will depend on how skillfully President Bush and the Democrats develop them as campaign themes in next year's elections.

TABLE 1
Pleased Or Disappointed With New Medicare Bill

"The Congress has passed a new Medicare bill that includes a new prescription drug benefit. Which of the following best describes how you feel about the new Medicare bill."

Base: All Adults

	Total	AGE					
		18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65 +
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pleased (Total)	20	15	12	21	25	23	16
I am very pleased that it passed	10	10	7	11	15	9	8
I am somewhat pleased that it passed	10	5	4	11	10	14	8
Disappointed (Total)	25	11	12	17	22	33	51
I am somewhat disappointed that it passed	8	4	3	5	9	8	14
I am very disappointed that it passed	18	7	9	12	13	25	37
Don't know/not sure	12	14	21	11	12	9	11
Don't know enough about it to have an opinion	42	59	56	50	41	35	22

Harris Interactive:
Nancy Wong
585.214.7316
nwong@harrisinteractive.com

Health Care Poll

TABLE 2

Who Gets Credit Or Blame?

“Some people like the bill, some people don’t. How much credit, or blame, do you think each of the following should get for this bill?”

Base: Those who know enough to have an opinion (e.g. 58% of all adults)

	President Bush should get:			Republicans in Congress should get:			Democrats in Congress should get:		
	All Adults	Ages 50-64	Ages 65+	All Adults	Ages 50-64	Ages 65+	All Adults	Ages 50-64	Ages 65+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Credit (Total)	36	38	28	34	37	32	31	28	23
A lot of credit	22	25	18	17	21	18	6	6	3
Some credit	14	13	10	17	16	14	25	23	20
BLAME (Total)	46	50	62	47	51	63	46	57	58
Some blame	11	9	18	13	10	19	28	36	38
A lot of blame	35	41	44	34	41	44	18	21	21
Not sure	19	11	9	19	11	5	24	15	18

TABLE 3

Approve/Disapprove Of Prescription Drug Benefit

“How do you feel about the four following pieces of the bill?”

(1) Prescription drug benefit for people on Medicare starting 2006

Base: Those who “know enough to have an opinion” (i.e. 58% of all adults)

	Total %	50-64 %	65+ %
Approve (Net)	55	57	48
Approve strongly	25	27	22
Approve somewhat	30	30	26
Disapprove (Net)	33	37	44
Disapprove somewhat	14	15	21
Disapprove strongly	18	22	23
Not sure	12	6	8

Health Care Poll

TABLE 4

Approve/Disapprove Of Drug Discount Card

“How do you feel about the four following pieces of the bill?”

(2) A drug discount card which will allow seniors to get a modest discount on their prescription drugs

Base: Those who “know enough to have an opinion” (i.e. 58% of all adults)

	Total %	50-64 %	65+ %
Approve (Net)	65	68	44
Approve strongly	29	20	19
Approve somewhat	35	48	25
Disapprove (Net)	25	27	45
Disapprove somewhat	11	11	19
Disapprove strongly	13	16	26
Not sure	11	5	10

TABLE 5

Approve/Disapprove Of Helping Insurers To Compete With Traditional Medicare

“How do you feel about the four following pieces of the bill?”

(3) A plan to help insurance and managed care plans to compete with traditional Medicare

Base: Those who “know enough to have an opinion” (i.e. 58% of all adults)

	Total %	50-64 %	65+ %
Approve (Net)	47	47	30
Approve strongly	20	19	10
Approve somewhat	27	28	19
Disapprove (Net)	37	42	54
Disapprove somewhat	15	16	18
Disapprove strongly	22	27	36
Not sure	16	11	16

TABLE 6

Approve/Disapprove Ban On Important Less Expensive Drugs

“How do you feel about the four following pieces of the bill?”

(4) A law which prohibits importing less expensive drugs from Canada

Base: Those who “know enough to have an opinion” (i.e. 58% of all adults)

	Total %	50-64 %	65+ %
Approve (Net)	17	14	12
Approve strongly	9	8	6
Approve somewhat	8	6	6
Disapprove (Net)	76	80	85
Disapprove somewhat	19	17	18
Disapprove strongly	56	63	67
Not sure	8	6	3

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Methodology:

This study was conducted online within the United States between December 3 and 5, 2003, among a nationwide cross section of 2,465 adults, ages 18 years and over. Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and 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.

In theory, with a probability sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of ± 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

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

About the Survey

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the award-winning Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at www.wsj.com/health.

About The Wall Street Journal Online

The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; www.dowjones.com), offers authoritative analysis, breaking news and commentary from top industry journalists. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web, with more than 686,000 subscribers worldwide. The Online Journal provides in-depth business news and financial information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with insight and analysis, including breaking business and technology news and analysis from around the world. It draws on the Dow Jones network of nearly 1,600 reporters and editors — the largest staff of business and financial journalists in the world. For the second consecutive year, the Online Journal received a WebAward for the "Best Newspaper Web Site" and was also cited by Yahoo! Internet Life magazine as the "Best Business News" site (2002 & 2001).

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877.919.4765

or visit our website at

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Media inquiries, contact:

Nancy Wong 585.214.7316

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