

January/February 1999

The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard Health News Index is designed to help the news media and people in the health field gain a better understanding of which health stories in the news Americans are following and what they understand about those health issues. Every two months, Kaiser/Harvard issues a new index report. This sixteenth report is based on a survey of 1,200 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between January 1 and February 2, 1999. For comparison purposes, respondents were also asked about other leading issues in the news during the same period.

HEALTH NEWS STORIES FOLLOWED BY THE PUBLIC

The health news story followed most closely by Americans in January was the report of a new research study identifying chimpanzees as the original source of HIV (40 percent).

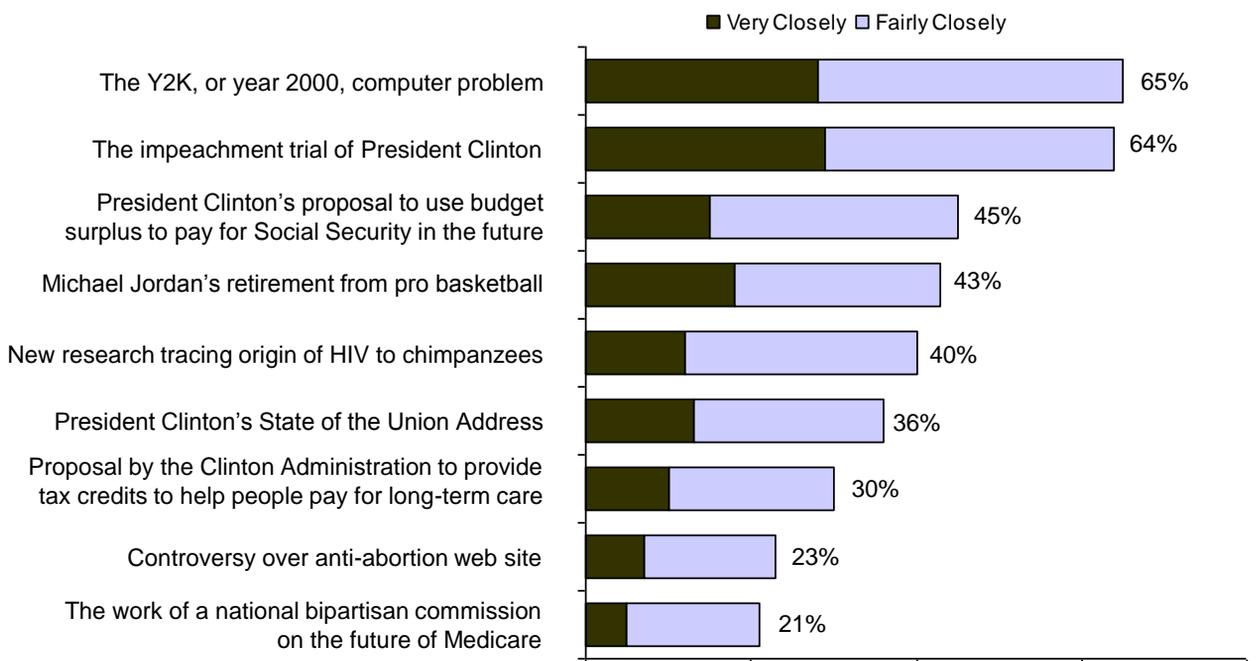
Among other health issues in the news, 30 percent closely followed a recent proposal by the Clinton Administration to provide tax credits to help pay for long-term care for the elderly and disabled. About one in five Americans closely followed the controversy surrounding an anti-abortion web site on the Internet (23 percent) and the work of the national bipartisan commission studying the future of Medicare (21 percent).

By comparison, 65 percent of Americans closely followed news reports about the Y2K, or year 2000, computer problem and 64 percent closely followed the impeachment trial of President Clinton in the Senate. About two out of five followed coverage of Clinton's proposal to use a portion of the budget surplus for Social Security (45 percent) and Michael Jordan's retirement from professional basketball (43 percent).

Just over a third of Americans (36 percent) said they closely followed President Clinton's State of the Union Address.

THE KAISER/HARVARD HEALTH NEWS INDEX

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from January 1 to February 2, 1999



WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

The State of the Union Address:

About one in three Americans closely followed news coverage of President Clinton's State of the Union Address. Asked whether specific proposals were made by Clinton in his speech, many said they did not know.

Health Care for Seniors

About half of Americans (49 percent) knew that the President proposed using some of the federal budget surplus to fortify Medicare. About two in five (38 percent) knew the President had proposed providing tax credits to help people pay for long-term care. Just one in five Americans (21 percent) knew Clinton had proposed allowing early retirees to buy into Medicare before turning 65. About two in ten (23 percent) mistakenly thought that Clinton had proposed asking seniors with higher incomes to pay more for Medicare; only 26 percent knew he had not made such a proposal.

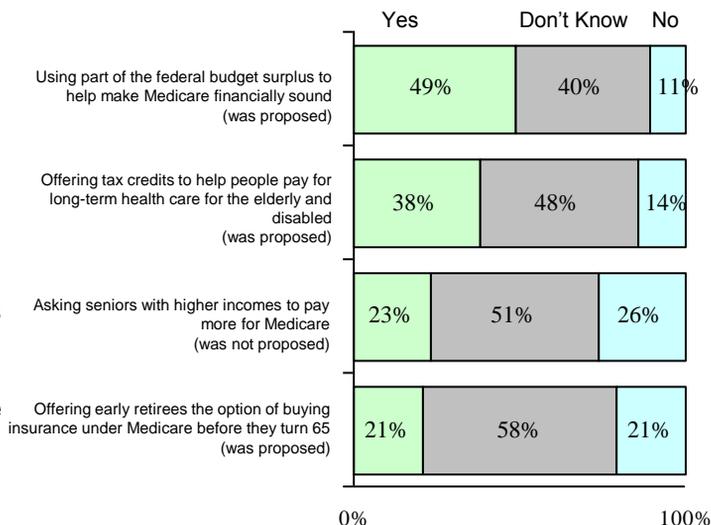
Social Security

Americans were slightly more familiar with President Clinton's proposals regarding Social Security. More than half knew that Clinton had proposed using the federal budget surplus to make Social Security financially sound (56 percent) and close to half (45 percent) knew he proposed having an independent board invest a portion of Social Security funds in the stock market. Thirty-eight percent of Americans also knew that the President had proposed helping individuals set up retirement savings accounts. Just over one fourth of Americans (27 percent) knew that the President had not proposed raising the age of eligibility for Social Security to 70 years (29 percent mistakenly thought he had made this proposal, 44 percent said don't know).

New Study on the Origins of AIDS:

Forty percent of Americans closely followed news reports of a new study tracing the origins of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and 63 percent knew that this research found that HIV originally came from chimpanzees (5 percent named other origins, 32 percent said they didn't know).

Please tell me whether or not the President--in his recent State of the Union Address--made each of the following proposals that would affect the *health care of seniors*:



Please tell me whether or not the President--in his recent State of the Union Address--made each of the following proposals regarding *Social Security*:

