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The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health's *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 issues. Every two months since 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 1,001 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between June 26 and July 28, 2000. 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**

About half of Americans closely followed two health news stories in July. Fifty-two percent (52%) closely followed the Florida tobacco case in which a Miami jury ordered tobacco companies to pay punitive damages to half a million sick Florida smokers. A similar percentage (51%) closely followed the continuing debate in Congress about

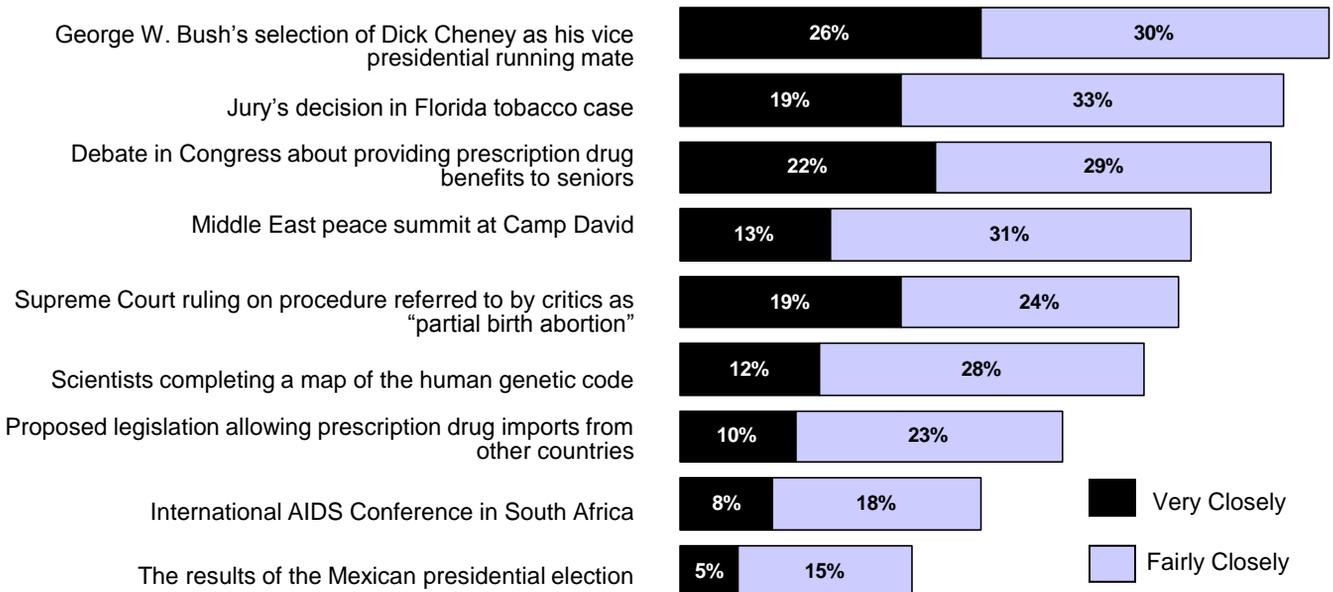
providing prescription drug benefits to seniors.

By comparison, 56% of Americans closely followed coverage of presidential candidate George W. Bush's selection of Dick Cheney as his vice presidential running mate. About four in ten Americans (44%) closely followed the Middle East peace summit at Camp David. Only one in five (20%) closely followed the results of the recent presidential election in Mexico.

Among other health issues in the news, about four in ten Americans (43%) closely followed the Supreme Court ruling that struck down a Nebraska state law banning an abortion procedure critics call "partial birth abortion." A similar percentage (40%) closely followed news about the completion of a rough draft of the map of the human genome. About one third of the public (33%) closely followed news of proposed legislation allowing prescription drug imports from other countries. Fewer Americans (26%) said they closely followed news about the International AIDS Conference held in South Africa.

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HEALTH NEWS INDEX**

**How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from June 26 to July 28, 2000**

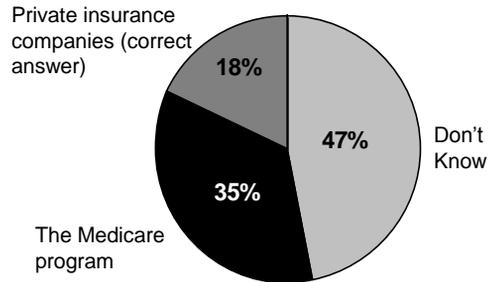


# WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

## **Medicare and Prescription Drug Benefits**

Fifty one percent of Americans said they closely followed news of the debate in Congress about providing prescription drug benefits to seniors. But relatively few were tuning in to the substance of the debate. When asked about a bill that was proposed by Republicans and recently passed by the House of Representatives, only 18% of Americans knew that the bill proposed providing drug coverage for seniors through private insurance companies. Thirty five percent incorrectly said the bill proposed providing drug coverage for seniors through the Medicare program (as Democrats propose), and almost half (47%) said they did not know.

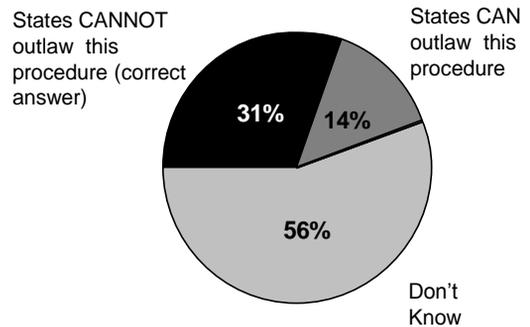
**A bill proposed by Republicans that was recently passed by the House of Representatives provides drug coverage for seniors through...**



## **Supreme Court Ruling on State law Banning Particular Abortion Procedure**

About four in ten Americans (43%) said they closely followed news reports of the Supreme Court's decision that overturned Nebraska's ban on the abortion procedure critics call "partial birth" abortion. About one third (31%) correctly said that the Court ruled that states do not have the right to outlaw this procedure. Fourteen percent of Americans erroneously thought that the Court had decided that states can outlaw this procedure, and more than half (56%) said they did not know what the Court had ruled.

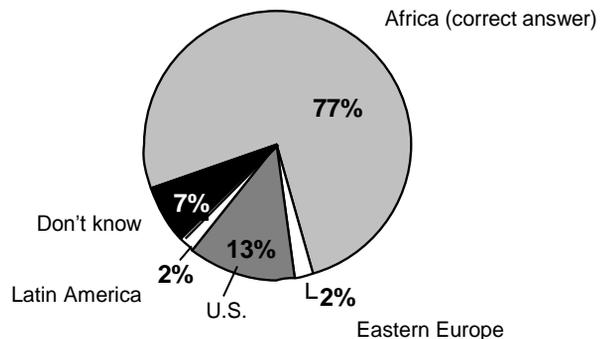
**Did the Supreme Court rule that states can or cannot outlaw a procedure sometimes called "partial-birth abortion"?**



## **AIDS in Africa**

About one in four Americans (26%) said they closely followed news coverage of the 13th International AIDS Conference held in South Africa. More than three quarters of Americans (77%) correctly named Africa as the part of the world with the largest number of people with HIV and AIDS. About four in ten respondents (42%) also correctly said that experts think that one-half of teenagers in the African countries hardest hit by HIV will eventually die of AIDS.

**Which part of the world has the largest number of people with HIV and AIDS?**



### ***Tobacco Companies***

About half of Americans (52%) closely followed news stories of the jury decision in the Florida case where sick smokers sued tobacco companies. About the same number of Americans (51%) correctly said that the amount the jury told the companies to pay was the largest damage award in American history. About one in five mistakenly thought it was the first time a jury had ordered the tobacco companies to pay damages to sick smokers (15%) or that it was a much smaller damage award than what tobacco companies have paid in past cases (4%). About one third (30%) of respondents said they did not know.