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The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard Health News Index is designed to help the news media and people in the health care field gain a better understanding of which health stories in the news Americans are following and what they understand about the health issues covered in the news. Every two months, Kaiser/Harvard issues a new index report. This sixth report is based on a survey of 1,202 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between April 28 and June 8, 1997. 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-related story followed most closely by Americans during May was the series of negotiations between state governments and tobacco companies. Sixty percent of Americans reported following that story very or fairly closely. By comparison, nearly four out of five (79%) of Americans followed the trial of Timothy McVeigh, who was convicted of bombing the federal

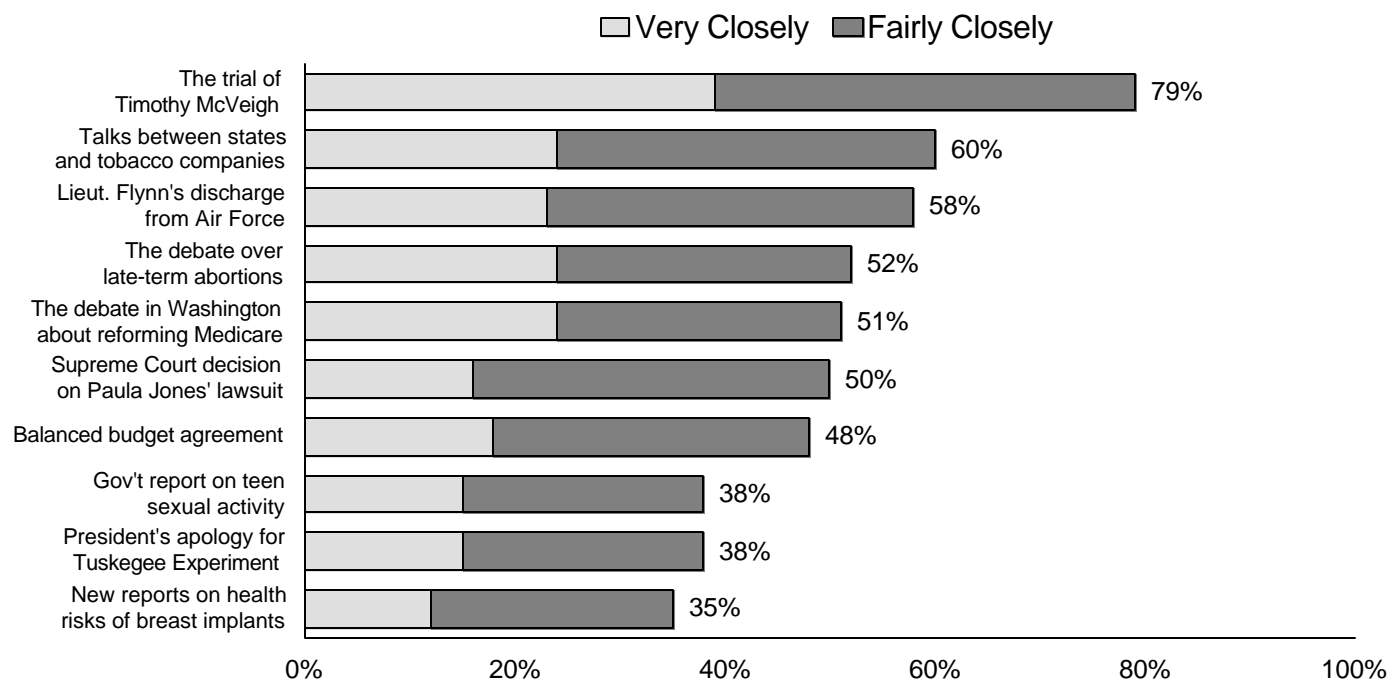
building in Oklahoma City, and 58% followed Lieutenant Kelly Flynn's general discharge from the Air Force.

Just more than half (52%) of Americans followed very or fairly closely the stories covering the debate over late-term (or "partial birth") abortions, making it the health-related story with the second highest interest level. Over half (51%) said they followed closely the debate in Washington about reforming Medicare. Slightly fewer (48%) reported following the working out of a balanced budget agreement between President Clinton and Congressional Republicans, which included changes in future spending on Medicaid and Medicare.

A government report on teen sexual activity was followed very or fairly closely by two in five Americans (38%) during the month of May. The same proportion (38%) said they followed the news stories reporting on President Clinton's apology for the medical research experiments at the Tuskegee Institute involving African-Americans. This story was followed more closely by African-Americans: more than half (52%) of African-Americans surveyed said they followed the apology for the Tuskegee experiment very or fairly closely.

## THE KAISER/HARVARD HEALTH NEWS INDEX

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from April 28 to June 8, 1997



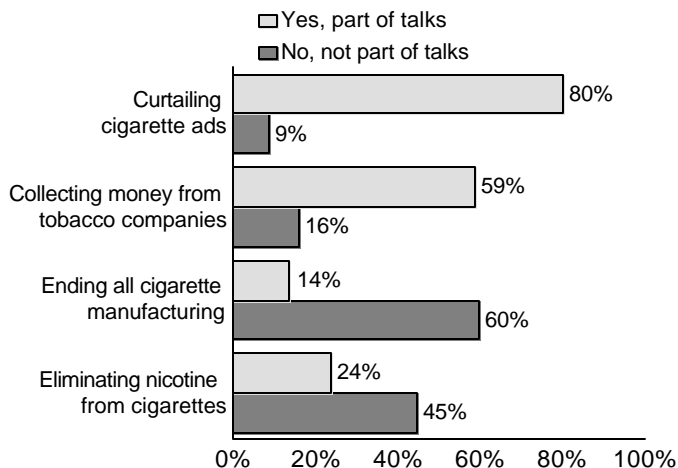
## WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

### *Negotiations Between States and Tobacco Companies:*

Four in five Americans (80%) knew that the negotiations involved a reduction in cigarette advertising, especially ads that might appeal to young people. About three out of five (59%) correctly said that the negotiations also involved the possibility of collecting large sums of money from the cigarette companies for states to use to help pay health care expenses for smokers.

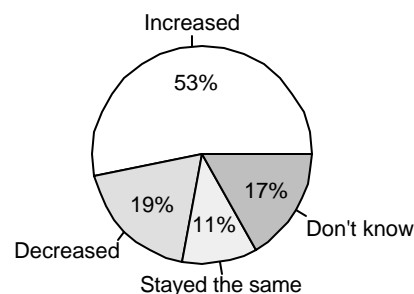
One quarter (24%) incorrectly thought that eliminating nicotine from cigarettes by a certain date was part of the negotiations and 14% mistakenly believed that the cigarette companies were considering ending all cigarette manufacturing in the United States.

### Which of the following were part of the tobacco talks?



**Correct answers:** Curtailing cigarette ads;  
Collecting money from tobacco companies

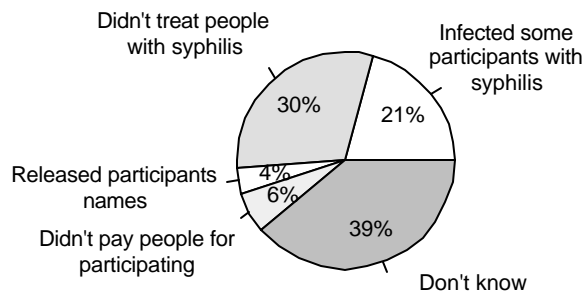
### What did a government report say about teen sexual activity?



**Correct answer:**  
Decreased

**Late-Term Abortions:** Only one-fourth (25%) knew that the Senate had passed a bill banning late-term abortion, which the President has said he will veto. Two in five (42%) incorrectly thought that the Senate had not succeeded in passing such a ban, and one-third (33%) didn't know.

### Why did the President apologize to African-Americans for the Tuskegee Experiment?



**Correct answer:**  
Didn't treat people with syphilis

**Tuskegee Experiment Apology:** Only three in ten Americans (30%) knew that the President had apologized for the government research conducted in the 1940s and 1950s because the researchers had not provided treatment to African-American subjects with syphilis, even though they knew the treatment would cure them. Despite following this story closely than the general population, the same proportion of African-Americans (30%) knew the correct reason for the Presidential apology.

The Kaiser/Harvard Health News Index is based on a national random sample survey of 1,202 Americans conducted June 18-23, 1997, to measure Americans' interest in and knowledge of health stories covered by the news media during the previous month. The survey was designed and analyzed jointly by the staff of the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University in consultation with the Pew Center for The People and The Press. The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates. The margin of error is  $\pm 3\%$ . For additional copies of this report, please call (800)656-4533.