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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 those health issues. Every two months, Kaiser/Harvard issues a new index report. This tenth report is based on a survey of 1,209 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between January 1 and February 5, 1998. 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 two stories that Americans said they followed the most closely in the first month of 1998 were the possible U.S. military action against Iraq (84%) and the investigation involving President Clinton and former White House intern Monica Lewinski (73%). About three in five Americans (61%) said

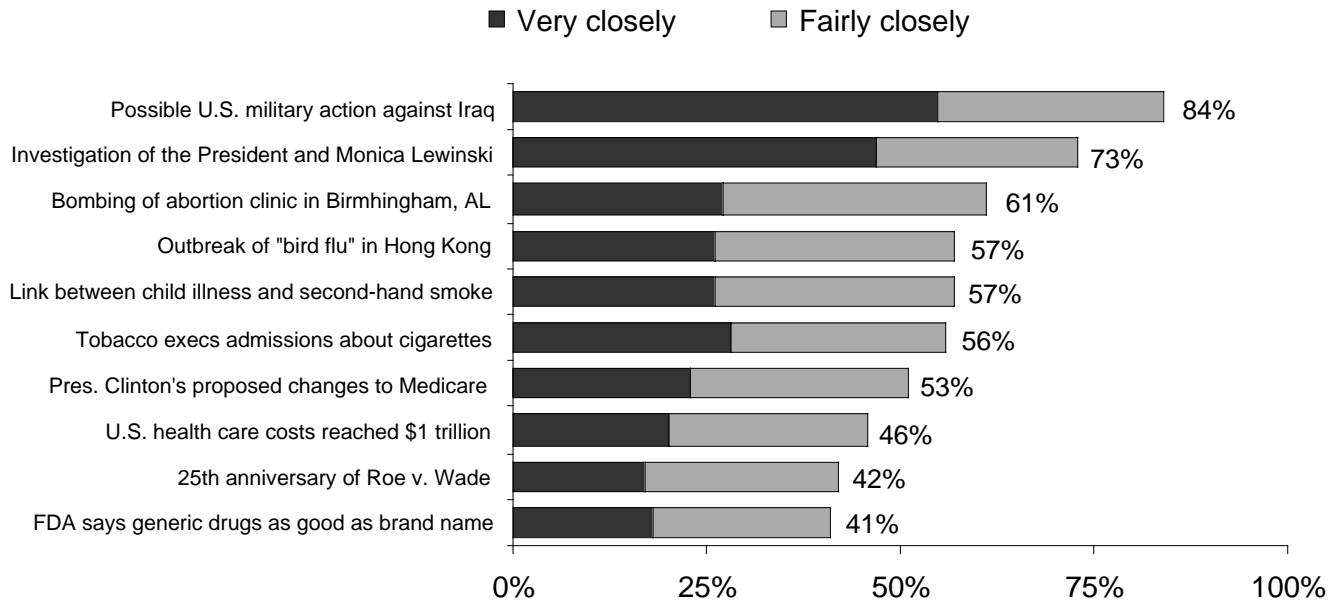
they followed very or fairly closely the stories about the bombing of an abortion clinic in Birmingham, AL. Another abortion-related story – the 25th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision – was followed by about two in five (42%) Americans.

More than half of the respondents said they followed four health-related stories very or fairly closely: the outbreak of the "bird flu" in Hong Kong (57%); reports that linked childhood illnesses to second-hand smoke (57%); the admission by tobacco executives that smoking is addictive and a health risk (56%); and President Clinton's proposed changes to Medicare, the federal program which provides health insurance to elderly and disabled Americans (53%).

Slightly less than half (46%) of those surveyed said they followed very or fairly closely the stories reporting that health care costs in the United States increased to a record \$1 trillion in 1996. Two in five (41%) reported following the FDA's announcement that generic drugs work as well as brand-name drugs.

THE KAISER/HARVARD HEALTH NEWS INDEX

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from January 1 to February 5, 1998



WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

Abortion: January marked the 25th anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision. Nearly six in ten (57%) of those surveyed knew that Roe v. Wade had made abortion legal in most cases. Thirteen percent incorrectly thought the decision had made late-term abortions illegal, and 9% thought it made women under age 18 notify a parent or guardian before having an abortion. One in five (21%) said they didn't know.

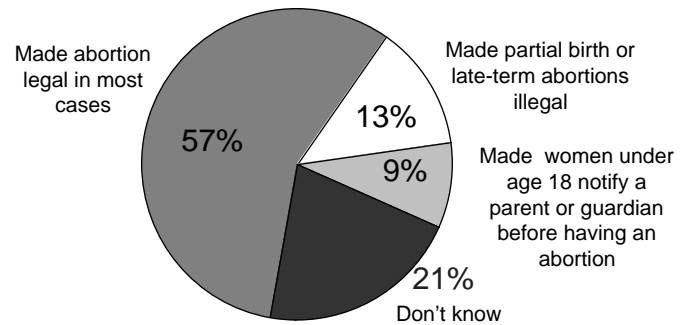
Also in January, a bomb exploded at an abortion clinic in Birmingham, AL, killing a security guard. Almost three-fourths (73%) of Americans knew that the bomb had exploded at an abortion clinic. Slightly fewer (56%) knew that someone had been killed in the explosion. One in four incorrectly said people had been injured, but no one killed (12%) or that there was only damage to the building (12%). One-fifth of respondents (20%) said they didn't know what had happened.

Medicare: In January, President Clinton proposed changes to Medicare, the federal program that provides health insurance for people age 65 and older. One in three (34%) correctly said the President's plan would allow people age 55 to 64 to buy Medicare coverage. Slightly more people (41%) said they didn't know what he had proposed.

Tobacco: Also in January, top tobacco company executives testified before Congress that nicotine is addictive, contradicting previous statements. More than three in five (62%) Americans knew that the executives had admitted that tobacco is addictive. About one in ten (12%) didn't know what they had said.

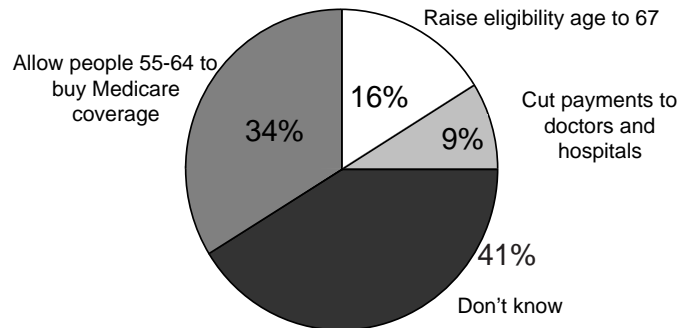
Health Care Costs: It was reported in January that health care costs in the United States reached \$1 trillion in 1996 and that health care costs rose faster than the overall cost of living. Almost two-thirds (63%) correctly said that health care costs rose faster than the cost of living that year. Eighteen percent said they didn't know; the same proportion said health care costs rose slower than the cost of living (3%) or at about the same rate (16%).

What did the Roe v. Wade decision do?



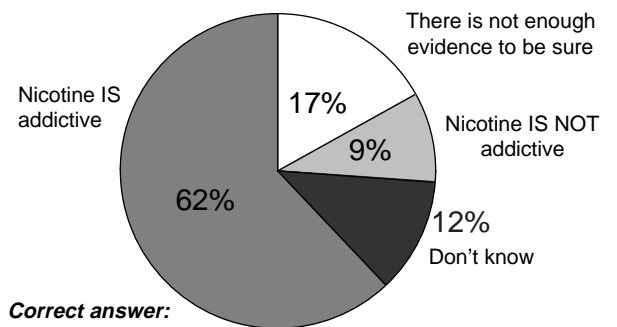
Correct answer:
Made abortion legal in most cases

What changes to Medicare did President Clinton propose?



Correct answer:
Allow people 55-64 to buy Medicare coverage

Tobacco company executives testified before Congress that...



Correct answer:
Nicotine IS addictive

The Kaiser/Harvard Health News Index is based on a national random sample survey of 1,209 Americans conducted February 13-17, 1998, to measure Americans' interest in and knowledge of health stories covered in 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.