



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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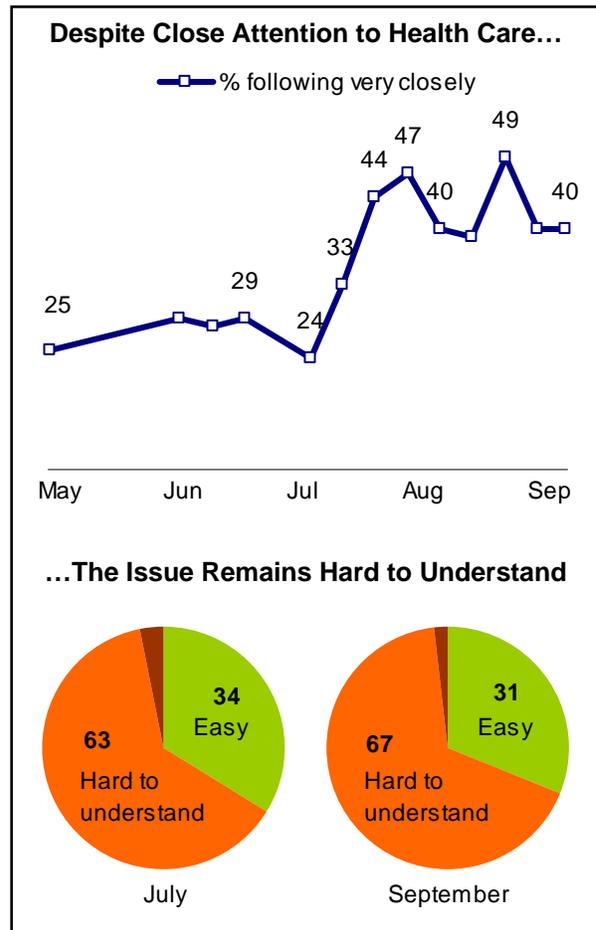
Most Plan to Watch Obama Health Care Speech
HEALTH CARE PROPOSALS REMAIN HARD TO FOLLOW

Interest in the health care reform debate has remained extremely high throughout the summer and more than nine-in-ten Americans say the issue is important to them. Still, despite the public focus on health care news, two thirds continue to say the issue is hard to understand.

With Congress returning from its August recess, more than half of Americans (56%) say they plan to watch President Obama's prime time speech to lawmakers Wednesday night on health care. More Democrats (72%) say they plan to watch than Republicans (41%) or independents (52%).

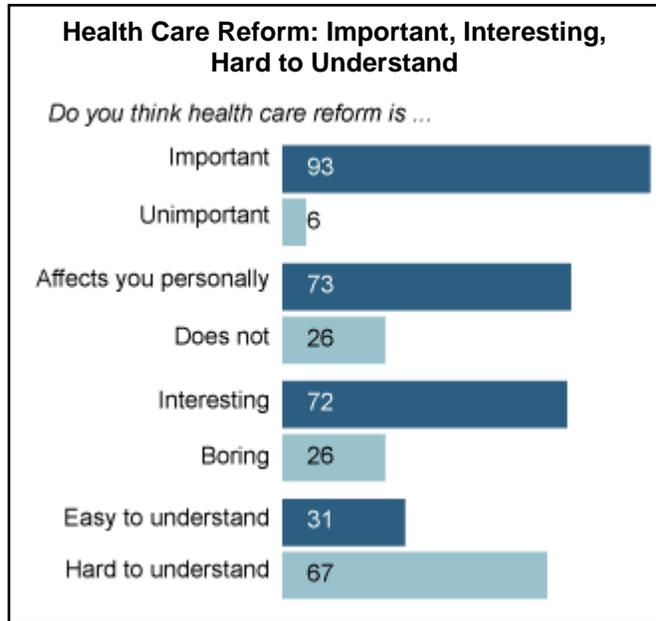
According to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted September 3-6 among 1,005 adults by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, four-in-ten Americans overall say they followed the health care debate very closely last week. Interest has been at about that level or higher since mid-July.

About three-in-ten (29%) say they followed the health care debate more closely than any other story last week. Once again, it was the most closely followed story of the week by a wide margin.



More than seven-in-ten (73%) Americans say the health care debate affects them personally, down slightly from the 78% that said the same in mid-July. In the current survey, 26% say it does not affect them personally, up slightly from 21% in July.

Nearly all Americans (93%) view the issue as important, about the same as the 95% that said the issue was important in July. More than seven-in-ten (72%) say the issue is interesting, matching the proportion in the earlier survey, 26% see it as boring.



Still, interest and media coverage notwithstanding, 67% say the health care debate remains hard to understand. That's about the same as the 63% that said the issue was hard to understand in mid-July. About three-in-ten (31%) say health care reform is easy to understand, little changed since July.

More than six-in-ten Americans (63%) say they have seen ads about health care reform in the past few weeks, while 36% say they have not. Substantially more people (28%) have seen ads with a mostly negative message about health care reform than mostly positive (12%). About one-in-five (21%) say they have seen a mix of positive and negative messages about health care reform in the ads. The proportion of people who report seeing mostly negative ads has grown steadily since mid-July, when it was 18%. In early August, the proportion was 22%.

Most Plan to Watch Obama's Speech, Have Seen Health Care Ads

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
<i>Plan to watch speech</i>	%	%	%	%
Yes	56	41	72	52
No	42	56	26	44
Don't know	3	4	1	3
	100	100	100	100
<i>Seen/heard ads on health care reform</i>				
Yes	63	63	66	60
<i>Ads were...</i>				
Mostly positive	12	10	19	8
Mostly negative	28	25	29	29
Mix of pos/neg	21	26	17	22
No	36	36	34	39
Don't know	1	1	*	1
	100	100	100	100

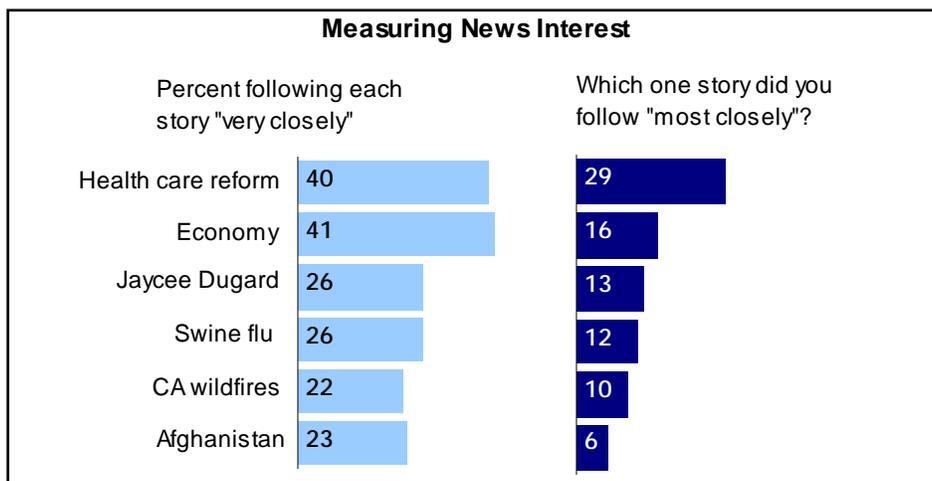
Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding. Q5 & Q6.

Most See Mix of Good and Bad Economic News

Almost seven-in-ten Americans (68%) say they are hearing a mix of good and bad news about the economy these days; 27% say they are hearing mostly bad news and 5% say they are hearing mostly good news. The proportion saying they are hearing a mix of good and bad economic news is at its highest level since the question was first asked nine months ago, edging the previous high of 64% reached in May.

Health Care Debate and Economy Remain Top Stories

News about health care reform and the nation's economy continues to dominate the public's attention. Almost three-in-ten (29%) say health care reform is the story they followed *most* closely last week, while 16% say they followed economic news most closely. Asked to rate how closely they followed these stories, 41% say they followed reports about the condition of the U.S. economy very closely, while 40% say the same about the debate over health care reform.



About a quarter (26%) say they followed reports about swine flu and the availability of a vaccine very closely; an equal percentage followed news about the discovery of 29-year-old Jaycee Dugard, who had been kidnapped and held captive since she was 11, very closely. Almost as many very closely followed news about the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan (23%) and news about Southern California wildfires (22%). The Dugard story was followed most closely by 13% of the public, while 12% followed swine flu news most closely and 10% followed wildfire news most closely.

These findings are based on the most recent installment of the weekly News Interest Index, an ongoing project of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The index, building on the Center's longstanding research into public attentiveness to major news stories, examines news interest as it relates to the news media's coverage. The weekly survey is conducted in conjunction with The Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, which monitors the news reported by major newspaper, television, radio and online news outlets on an ongoing basis. In the most recent week, survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected September 3-6, 2009 from a nationally representative sample of 1,005 adults. Data relating to news coverage – collected from August 31-September 6, 2009 – will be released Wednesday, September, 9 2009 and can be found on PEJ's website: journalism.org.

About the News Interest Index

The *News Interest Index* is a weekly survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press aimed at gauging the public's interest in and reaction to major news events.

This project has been undertaken in conjunction with the Project for Excellence in Journalism's *News Coverage Index*, an ongoing content analysis of the news. The News Coverage Index catalogues the news from top news organizations across five major sectors of the media: newspapers, network television, cable television, radio and the internet. Each week (from Monday through Sunday) PEJ compiles this data to identify the top stories for the week. The News Interest Index survey collects data from Friday through Monday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for the weekly surveys are based on telephone interviews among a nationwide sample of approximately 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, conducted under the direction of ORC (Opinion Research Corporation). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls, and that results based on subgroups will have larger margins of error.

For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to www.journalism.org.

About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
September 3-6, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1005

Q.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] [IF NECESSARY “Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?”]**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>
a. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy	41	31	15	13	*
August 28-31, 2009	45	30	13	12	1
August 21-24, 2009	50	27	13	10	1
August 14-17, 2009	41	37	11	12	*
August 7-10, 2009	42	34	13	10	*
July 31-August 3, 2009	46	34	11	8	*
July 24-27, 2009	45	35	12	8	*
July 17-20, 2009	43	35	11	11	1
July 10-13, 2009	37	38	13	11	*
July 2-5, 2009	38	35	15	12	*
June 19-22, 2009	42	33	15	10	*
June 12-15, 2009	41	35	12	12	*
June 5-8, 2009	41	34	11	14	*
May 29-June 1, 2009	43	37	11	8	*
May 21-24, 2009	44	35	13	9	*
May 15-18, 2009	44	35	12	8	*
May 8-11, 2009	42	34	12	12	*
May 1-4, 2009	47	36	11	5	1
April 17-20, 2009	52	30	10	7	1
April 9-13, 2009	48	29	13	10	0
March 27-30, 2009	48	32	10	10	*
March 20-23, 2009	52	34	8	6	*
March 13-16, 2009	48	33	9	10	*
February 27-March 2, 2009	56	30	8	6	*
February 13-16, 2009	55	29	10	6	*
January 30-February 2, 2009	52	31	12	5	*
January 23-26, 2009	57	30	8	5	0
January 16-19, 2009	43	35	13	9	*
January 2-4, 2009	42	36	15	7	*
December 12-15, 2008	51	33	9	7	*
December 5-8, 2008	42	38	13	7	*
November 21-24, 2008	59	24	9	8	*
November 14-17, 2008	56	29	9	6	*
November 7-10, 2008	54	31	8	7	*
October 31-November 3, 2008	63	27	6	4	*
October 24-27, 2008	52	35	7	5	1
October 17-20, 2008	62	29	6	3	*
October 10-13, 2008	65	25	7	3	*
October 3-6, 2008	69	23	5	3	*
September 26-29, 2008	70	22	5	3	*
September 19-22, 2008	56	27	12	5	*
September 5-8, 2008	44	33	16	7	*
August 29-31, 2008	41	34	13	11	1
August 15-18, 2008	39	36	15	10	*

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
August 8-11, 2008	39	35	16	10	*
August 1-4, 2008	47	34	11	8	0
July 25-28, 2008	46	32	10	12	*
July 18-21, 2008	45	33	13	9	*
July 11-14, 2008	44	33	12	10	1
June 27-30, 2008	49	31	12	7	1
June 13-16, 2008	42	33	14	11	*
May 9-12, 2008	45	31	13	11	*
May 2-5, 2008	43	31	15	10	1
April 18-21, 2008	41	35	13	10	1
April 4-7, 2008	39	37	12	12	*
March 28-31, 2008	42	36	14	8	*
March 20-24, 2008	45	33	13	9	*
February 29-March 3, 2008	38	35	15	11	1
February 15-18, 2008	37	36	11	16	8
February 1-4, 2008	40	37	14	8	1
January 18-21, 2008	42	31	16	11	*
January 11-14, 2008	36	32	15	16	1
November 2-5, 2007	27	37	16	19	1
October 19-22, 2007	25	34	20	21	*
August 10-13, 2007	28	36	18	18	*
Mid-November, 2006	31	40	17	11	1
December, 2005	35	35	18	11	1
Early November, 2005	35	39	17	9	*
Mid-May, 2005	30	39	19	11	1
January, 2005	35	41	17	7	*
Mid-October, 2004	30	43	16	10	1
Early September, 2004	39	34	15	11	1
Mid-January, 2004	37	41	15	7	*
December, 2003	35	38	14	11	2
November, 2003	40	34	15	10	1
October, 2003	32	39	16	12	1
September, 2003	39	30	18	12	1
March, 2003	40	35	16	8	1
February, 2003	42	33	15	10	*
January, 2003	40	35	13	11	1
December, 2002	38	34	17	10	1
February, 2002	35	40	15	9	1
January, 2002	30	44	16	9	1
December, 2001	37	40	13	8	2
Mid-November, 2001	41	36	15	7	1
June, 2001	24	41	18	16	1
May, 2001	34	36	15	15	0
April, 2001	36	34	16	13	1
February, 2001	30	39	18	12	1
January, 2001	32	38	17	11	2
June, 1995	26	41	22	11	*
March, 1995	27	45	19	9	*
February, 1995	23	41	22	13	1
December, 1994	28	43	20	9	*
October, 1994	27	40	20	12	1
June, 1994	25	42	23	10	*
May, 1994	33	40	16	10	1

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
January, 1994	34	39	16	10	1
Early January, 1994	36	44	13	7	*
December, 1993	35	41	15	8	1
October, 1993	33	38	20	9	*
September, 1993	37	40	14	8	1
Early September, 1993	39	39	14	9	*
August, 1993	41	36	14	9	*
May, 1993	37	38	18	6	1
February, 1993	49	36	10	5	*
January, 1993	42	39	12	7	*
September, 1992	43	37	13	6	1
May, 1992	39	39	15	6	1
March, 1992	47	38	11	4	*
February, 1992	47	37	10	6	*
January, 1992	44	40	11	5	*
October, 1991	36	38	16	9	1
b. Debate over health care reform	40	26	16	17	0
August 28-31, 2009	40	28	17	14	1
August 21-24, 2009	49	24	12	15	1
August 14-17, 2009	39	31	15	15	1
TREND FOR COMPARISON:¹					
August 7-10, 2009: <i>Debate in Washington over health care reform</i>	40	27	17	15	1
July 31-August 3, 2009	47	26	14	13	1
July 24-27, 2009	44	28	15	13	*
July 17-20, 2009	33	31	13	21	2
July 10-13, 2009	24	29	20	27	*
June 26-29, 2009	29	26	20	25	1
June 19-22, 2009	28	28	20	23	*
June 12-15, 2009	29	26	18	26	*
May 15-18, 2009: <i>Debate over Obama's health care plans</i>	25	30	20	24	*
March 6-9, 2009: <i>Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling health care</i>	41	32	13	14	*
September, 1994: <i>The Clinton administration's health care reform proposals</i>	32	41	18	9	*
June, 1994	34	40	19	7	*
May, 1994	37	37	16	9	1
January, 1994	38	38	15	9	*
Early January, 1994	40	40	14	6	*
December, 1993	45	35	12	7	1
October, 1993	44	32	17	6	1
September, 1993	49	34	11	6	*
August, 1993: <i>Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton</i>	27	32	25	15	1

¹ June 12-15, 2009 to August 7-10, 2009 asked about: "Debate in Washington over health care reform." May 15-18, 2009 asked about: "Debate over Barack Obama's health care plans." March 6-9, 2009 asked about: "Barack Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling the U.S. health care system." September, 1993 through September, 1994 asked about: "The Clinton Administration's health care reform proposals." May, 1993 through August, 1993 asked about: "Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton."

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
June, 1993	28	38	19	15	*
May, 1993	30	30	25	14	1
c. Reports about swine flu and the availability of a vaccine					
August 28-31, 2009	26	32	25	17	0
TREND FOR COMPARISON²:	26	33	22	18	*
May 21-24, 2009	30	39	21	11	*
May 8-11, 2009	34	36	19	11	*
May 1-4, 2009	43	37	15	4	1
April 25-27, 2009	25	30	19	26	*
d. The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan					
August 21-24, 2009 ³	23	33	23	21	0
August 7-10, 2009	14	32	26	28	1
March 20-23, 2009	24	32	23	21	1
February 20-23, 2009	24	32	22	22	*
January 30-February 2, 2009	27	29	24	19	1
January 2-4, 2009	26	34	24	16	*
October 24-27, 2008	22	33	23	21	1
October 10-13, 2008	28	32	22	17	1
September 12-15, 2008	19	34	29	18	*
August 29-31, 2008	21	34	25	19	1
July 18-21, 2008	18	27	32	23	*
July 11-14, 2008	27	33	24	16	*
July 3-7, 2008	19	28	29	23	1
June 20-23, 2008	19	28	32	21	*
Late July, 2002	20	30	30	20	*
June, 2002	41	38	13	7	1
April, 2002	38	32	20	9	1
Early April, 2002	39	39	13	8	1
February, 2002	45	37	12	5	1
January, 2002	47	39	8	5	1
December, 2001	51	35	9	4	1
Mid-November, 2001	44	38	12	5	1
Early November, 2001	49	36	11	3	1
Mid-October, 2001	45	36	12	6	1
Mid-October, 2001	51	35	10	3	1
e. Southern California wildfires					
TREND FOR COMPARISON:	22	32	29	16	0
April 24-27, 2009: <i>Wildfires in South Carolina</i>	12	21	29	38	*
November 14-17, 2008: <i>California wildfires</i>	21	28	29	22	*

² May 21-24, 2009 and May 8-11, 2009 asked about: "Reports about swine flu in the U.S. and elsewhere." For May 1-4, 2009 the story was listed as: "The outbreak of swine flu in different parts of the world." For April 25-27, 2009 the story was listed as: "Reports of swine flu in Mexico and the U.S."

³ August 21-24, 2009 asked about "Afghanistan's presidential election." February 20-23, 2009 asked about "The Obama administration's decision to send 17,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan." From June 20-23, 2008 to October 10-13, 2008 the story was listed as "The military effort in Afghanistan against Taliban fighters."

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
October 17-20, 2008: <i>California wildfires</i>	15	28	33	24	*
July 11-14, 2008: <i>California wildfires</i>	22	34	28	16	*
October 26-29, 2007: <i>California wildfires</i>	40	41	13	6	*
January 12-15, 2007: <i>Fires in Malibu, Calif</i>	10	20	31	38	1
November, 2003: <i>California wildfires</i>	38	35	17	9	1
June, 2002: <i>Wildfires in Colorado and other western states</i>	30	36	25	9	*
September, 2001: <i>Wild fires in the west</i>	28	37	24	11	*
December, 1993: <i>Southern California fires</i>	44	39	13	4	*
July, 1990: <i>Southern California fires</i>	29	35	24	12	0
f. The discovery of 29-year-old Jaycee Dugard who had been kidnapped and held captive since she was 11					
August 28-31, 2009 ⁴	26	31	23	19	*
	27	34	21	17	1
TREND FOR COMPARISON					
January 26-29, 2007: <i>News about two kidnapped boys who were found in Missouri</i>	23	31	21	24	1
January 19-22, 2007: <i>Two kidnapped boys found in Missouri</i>	27	35	20	17	1
March, 2003: <i>The Utah girl found alive nine months after being kidnapped from her home</i>	34	36	20	10	*
September, 2002: <i>News stories about kidnapped children</i>	49	30	14	6	1

Q.2 Which ONE of the stories I just mentioned have you followed most closely, or is there another story you've been following MORE closely? [**DO NOT READ LIST. ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE.**]

- 29 Debate over health care reform
- 16 Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
- The discovery of 29-year-old Jaycee Dugard who had been kidnapped and held captive since she was 11
- 13 since she was 11
- 12 Reports about swine flu and the availability of a vaccine
- 10 Southern California wildfires
- 6 The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan
- 6 Some other story (VOL.)
- 8 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

⁴ August 28-31, 2009 asked about "The discovery of a 29-year-old woman in California who had been kidnapped and held captive since she was 11."

On another topic...

Q.3 Are you hearing mostly good news about the economy these days, mostly bad news about the economy or a mix of both good and bad news?

	Hearing mostly <u>good news</u>	Hearing mostly <u>bad news</u>	A mix of good and <u>bad news</u>	DK/ <u>Refused</u>
September 3-6, 2009	5	27	68	1
August 7-10, 2009	11	29	59	1
July 2-5, 2009	3	41	56	*
June 12-15, 2009	4	37	59	*
May 8-11, 2009	4	31	64	1
April 9-13, 2009	4	39	56	1
March 13-16, 2009	2	51	46	1
February 13-16, 2009	2	60	37	1
January 16-19, 2009	2	67	30	1
December 5-8, 2008	1	80	19	*

Q.4 Thinking about the issue of health care reform, do you think it... [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]. DO you think it [NEXT ITEM]?

		July 17-20 <u>2009</u>
a.	72 Is interesting [OR]	72
	26 Boring	25
	2 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	3
b.	73 Affects you personally [OR]	78
	26 Does not affect you personally	21
	1 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	1
c.	31 Is easy to understand [OR]	34
	67 Hard to understand	63
	2 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	3
d.	93 Is important [OR]	95
	6 Unimportant	4
	* Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	1

Q.5 In the past few weeks, have you seen or heard any ads on the subject of health care reform? [If Yes, were these ads mostly a positive message about efforts to reform the health care system or mostly a negative message about efforts to reform health care?]

[DO NOT READ LIST. RECORD ONE ANSWER.]

		August 7-10	July 17-20
		<u>2009</u>	<u>2009</u>
63	Yes [NET]	62	50
12	Yes, have seen, mostly a positive message about health care reform	16	16
28	Yes, have seen, mostly a negative message about health care reform	22	18
21	Yes have seen, mix of positive and negative (VOL.)	22	14
2	Yes, have seen, don't remember whether positive or negative (VOL.)	2	2
36	No haven't seen	35	47
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	3	2

Q.6 On Wednesday, President Obama will give a prime time speech to a joint session of Congress on health care – do you plan to watch the speech or not?

56	Yes, plan to watch
42	No, do not plan to watch
3	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)