

FOR RELEASE JANUARY 20, 2015

# Obama in a Word: ‘Good,’ ‘Incompetent’

*Fewer See This Year’s State of the  
Union as More Important*

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
ON THIS REPORT:**

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## *Fewer See This Year's State of the Union as More Important*

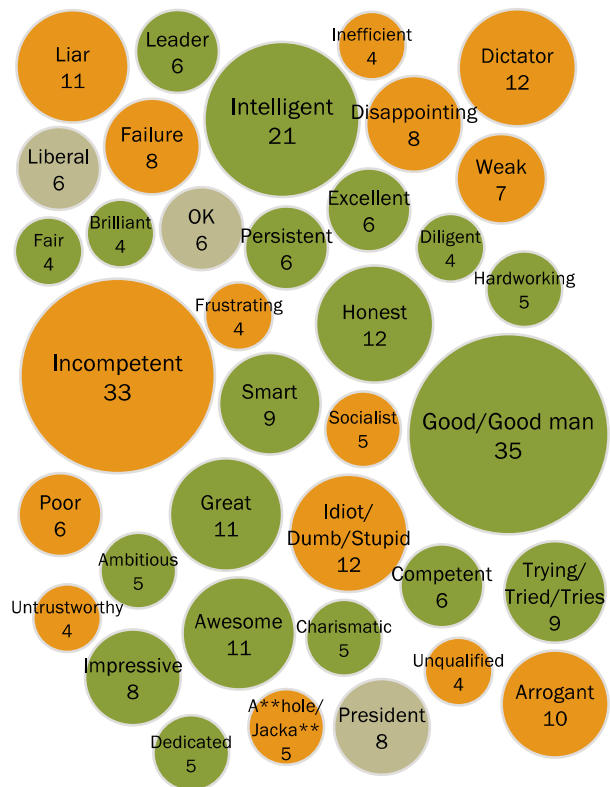
As public perceptions of Barack Obama have changed over the course of his presidency, so too have the words used to describe him.

The national survey by the Pew Research Center, conducted Jan. 7-11 among 1,504 adults, finds that the words *good* (35 mentions) and *incompetent* (33 mentions) are used most frequently to describe Obama. Those words also were used most often in June 2013, the last time this question was asked. This report shows the actual number of respondents mentioning each word; they are *not* percentages.

### What One Word Best Describes Barack Obama?

Out of 746 surveyed, number saying ...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral



Note: These are the numbers of respondents who offered each of the top responses. These are **NOT** percentages. Top responses shown; for complete list, see survey topline.  
Survey conducted Jan. 7-11, 2015

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However, some new words have emerged in the descriptions of Obama: Among the roughly half of respondents asked the question (N=746), *dictator* is mentioned by 12, while eight describe Obama as *impressive*. Neither word had been used in nine prior surveys asking for one-word descriptions of Obama since he became president.

And a perennial critique of Obama – *socialist* – is not as prominent on the list of descriptions as in the past; in the new survey, five respondents describe Obama as a socialist. In April 2009, when Obama was generally described in positive terms (and [his job approval](#) was much higher than it is today), *socialist* stood out among the negatives.

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### Shifting Impressions of Barack Obama

Apr 2009	Jun 2013	Jan 2015
# of responses	# of responses	# of responses
30 Intelligent	34 Good	35 Good
29 Good	27 Incompetent	33 Incompetent
20 Socialist	18 Honest	21 Intelligent
17 Liberal	18 Liar	12 Dictator
16 Great	17 Excellent	12 Honest
15 Confident	15 Great	12 Idiot/Stupid
13 Inexperienced	15 Intelligent	11 Awesome
12 Honest	15 Socialist	11 Great
12 Trying	14 Fair	11 Liar
11 Smart	11 Leader	10 Arrogant
10 Change	11 Smart	9 Smart
10 Competent	10 President	9 Trying/Tries
10 Excellent	9 Confident	8 Disappointing
10 Spend/Spending	9 Inept	8 Failure
9 Arrogant	8 Disappointing	8 Impressive
9 Hope/Hopeful	8 Hardworking	8 President
8 Charismatic	8 Trying/Tries	
8 Presidential		
N=742	N=769	N=746

NOTE: These are the numbers of respondents who offered each of the top responses. These are **NOT** percentages. Top responses shown; for complete list, see survey topline.  
Survey conducted Jan. 7-11, 2015.

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Still, many of the descriptions of Obama are the same as those used in the past. Some supporters continue to point to his *intelligence* (21 mentions; another nine call him *smart*), while opponents describe him as an *idiot* or *stupid* (12). Nearly equal numbers call him *honest* (12) and a *liar* (11).

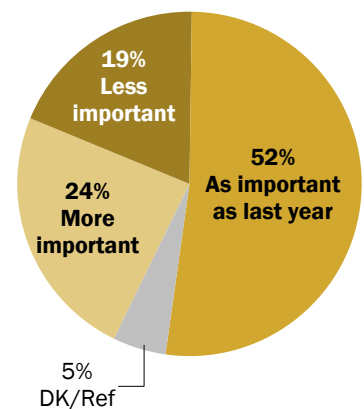
In February 2007, at a comparable point in his presidency, *incompetent*, *arrogant* and *honest* were frequently used descriptions of George W. Bush. Bush's approval rating was lower than Obama's (33% for Bush then, 47% for Obama today) and negative terms were used more frequently to describe him.

As Obama prepares to deliver his sixth State of the Union, 24% say his speech will be more important than past addresses, while 19% say it will be less important; 52% say it is about as important as previous State of the Unions.

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### Importance of 2015 State of Union

*Compared w/ past years, this year's State of the Union address is ...*



Survey conducted Jan. 7-11, 2015. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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Fewer view tonight's speech as more important than said that before Obama's State of the Union speeches in 2013 (32%) and 2012 (36%). And in January 2010, 39% viewed Obama's State of the Union as more important than previous speeches.

As in past years, there are substantial partisan differences in opinions about the importance of Obama's State of the Union address. Nearly four-in-ten Democrats (37%) say this year's speech will be more important than those of previous years, compared with 20% of independents and just 13% of Republicans. By contrast, Republicans (32%) are far more likely than independents (22%) or Democrats (7%) to view Obama's speech as less important.

### Views of Importance of State of the Union: Obama, Bush and Clinton

*Compared with past years, this year's State of the Union address is ...*

	<b>More important</b>	<b>Less important</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>DK/Ref</b>
	%	%	%	%
<b>Obama</b>				
Jan 2015	24	19	52	5=100
Feb 2013	32	15	43	9=100
Jan 2012	36	14	46	5=100
Jan 2011	28	11	53	8=100
Jan 2010	39	9	45	7=100
<b>Bush</b>				
Jan 2008	19	27	46	8=100
Jan 2007	32	16	43	9=100
Jan 2006	30	14	47	9=100
Jan 2005	34	9	47	10=100
Jan 2004	34	9	49	8=100
Jan 2003	52	6	35	7=100
Jan 2002	54	4	36	6=100
<b>Clinton</b>				
Jan 2000	16	22	53	9=100
Jan 1999	27	16	51	6=100

Survey conducted Jan. 7-11, 2015. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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## About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted January 7-11, 2015 among a national sample of 1,504 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (528 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 976 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 563 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2013 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cell phone only, or both landline and cell phone), based on extrapolations from the 2014 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	1,504	2.9 percentage points
Republican	336	6.2 percentage points
Democrat	458	5.3 percentage points
Independent	647	4.4 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

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.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
JANUARY 2015 POLITICAL SURVEY  
FINAL TOPLINE  
JANUARY 7-11, 2015  
N=1,504**

**QUESTIONS 1-2 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=746]:**

Q.3F2 What ONE WORD best describes your impression of Barack Obama? Just the one word that best describes him. **[OPEN-END. PROBE ONCE IF RESPONDENT ANSWERS "DON'T KNOW". ACCEPT UP TO TWO RESPONSES, BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR SECOND RESPONSE]**

*NOTE: The numbers listed represent the number of respondents who offered each response; the numbers are not percentages. Unique responses of three or less are not listed.*

	<u>Jan 7-11, 2015</u>	<u>Jun 12-16, 2013</u>	<u>Aug 31-Sep 3, 2012</u>	<u>Aug 31-Sep 3, 2012</u>			
35	Good/Good man	34	Good/Good man	38	Good/Good man/Good job	4	Clueless
33	Incompetent	27	Incompetent	30	Trying/Tried/Tries	4	Confident
21	Intelligent	18	Honest	27	President	4	Courageous
12	Dictator	18	Liar	25	Failed/Failure	4	Dishonest
12	Honest	17	Excellent	24	Incompetent	4	Dislike/Don't like
12	Idiot/Dumb/Stupid	15	Great	21	Great/Greater	4	Ignorant
11	Awesome	15	Intelligent	17	Honest/Honesty	4	Ineffective/Ineffectual
11	Great	15	Socialist	17	Intelligent	4	Inept
11	Liar	14	Fair	14	Disappointing	4	Interesting
10	Arrogant	11	Leader	14	Liar	4	Lousy
9	Smart	11	Smart	13	Socialist	4	Not good
9	Trying/Tried/Tries	10	President	12	Leader	4	Positive
8	Disappointing	9	Confident	12	Loser	4	Scary
8	Failure	9	Inept	11	Like him/Likeable	4	Smart
8	Impressive	8	Disappointing	11	OK	4	Stinks/Sucks
8	President	8	Hard worker/Hardworking	10	Nice	4	Wonderful
7	Weak	8	Trying/Tries	8	Arrogant	4	Selfish/Self-centered
6	Competent	7	Caring	8	Excellent		
6	Excellent	7	Dishonest	7	Bad		N=1,008
6	Leader	7	Idiot	7	Idiot		
6	Liberal	6	Arrogant	7	Trustworthy		
6	OK	6	Dedicated	6	Awesome		
6	Persistent	6	Failure	6	Best		
6	Poor	6	Fake	6	Charismatic		
5	Ambitious	6	Liberal	6	Competent		
5	A**hole/Jacka**	6	OK	6	Fantastic		
5	Charismatic	5	Fantastic	6	Sh**/Horse sh**		
5	Dedicated	5	Inexperienced	6	Sincere		
5	Hardworking	4	Charismatic	5	Alright		
5	Socialist	4	Competent	5	Capable		
4	Brilliant	4	Integrity	5	Deceitful/Deceiving		
4	Diligent	4	Interesting	5	Dedicated		
4	Fair	4	Mediocre	5	Fair		
4	Frustrating	4	Poor	5	Favorable		
4	Inefficient	4	Puppet	5	Fine		
4	Unqualified	4	Untruthful	5	Inexperienced		
4	Untrustworthy			5	Joke		
		N=769		5	Presidential		
				5	Sorry		
				5	Terrible		
				4	A**hole/Jacka**		
				4	Black		
	N=746						



## Q3.F2 CONTINUED...

<u>Jan 11-16, 2012</u>		<u>Jan 5-9, 2011</u>		<u>January, 2010</u>		<u>Mid-April, 2009<sup>1</sup></u>	
24	Good	30	Good	25	Intelligent	30	Intelligent
21	Incompetent	25	Trying	21	Inexperienced	29	Good
19	Intelligent	20	Socialist	21	Trying	20	Socialist
17	Socialist	19	Inexperienced	18	Good	17	Liberal
16	Honest	16	Incompetent	15	Socialist	16	Great
16	Trying	14	Great	12	Honest	15	Confident
15	Disappointing	13	Intelligent	12	Unqualified	13	Inexperienced
11	Smart	13	Leader	11	Arrogant	12	Honest
10	Unqualified	12	Liar	11	Fair	12	Trying
9	Inexperienced	11	Strong	11	Incompetent	11	Smart
8	Failure	11	Smart	10	Confident	10	Change
8	Great	10	Determined	10	Different	10	Competent
8	Leader	10	Liberal	10	Strong	10	Excellent
7	Hardworking	9	Disappointing	8	Change	10	Spender/Spending
7	President	9	Honest	8	Great	9	Arrogant
7	Sincere	9	Idiot	7	OK	9	Hope/Hopeful
7	Sucks	8	President	7	Smart	8	Charismatic
6	Arrogant	7	Capable	6	Capable	8	President/Presidential
6	Bad	7	Fair	6	Disappointing	7	Different
6	Competent	6	Alright	6	Excellent	7	Leader
6	Determined	6	Excellent	6	Fake	5	Caring/Cares
6	Hopeful	6	OK	6	Leader	5	Determined
6	Inept	5	Deceitful/Deceptive	6	Liar	5	Efficient
6	Weak	5	Talker	5	Charismatic	5	Strong
5	Brilliant	5	Unqualified	5	Communist	5	Young
5	Capable	4	Arrogant	5	Idiot	4	Ambitious
5	Courageous	4	Dynamic	5	Liberal	4	Awesome
5	Excellent	4	Hope/Hopeful	5	President	4	Capable
5	Fair	4	Naïve	4	Clueless	4	Impressed
5	Ineffective	4	Personable	4	Competent	4	Incompetent
5	Fake	4	Puppet	4	Dedicated	4	Integrity
4	Awesome	4	Weak	4	Determined	4	Naïve
4	Change			4	Dishonest	4	Politician
4	Confused		<i>N=766</i>	4	Hopeful		<i>N=742</i>
4	Mediocre			4	Integrity		
4	OK			4	Young		
4	Untrustworthy						
	<i>N=748</i>				<i>N=740</i>		

## QUESTIONS 4F1-5F2 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

## ASK ALL:

Q.6 As you may know, Barack Obama will give his annual State of the Union address this month... Do you consider this year's State of the Union address to be MORE important than past years', LESS important, or about as important as past years'?

	<u>More important</u>	<u>Less important</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
<b>Obama</b>				
Jan 7-11, 2015	24	19	52	5
Feb 7-10, 2013	32	15	43	9
Jan 11-16, 2012	36	14	46	5
Jan 20-23, 2011 <sup>2</sup>	28	11	53	8

<sup>1</sup> Full trend not shown; question was also asked in February 2008, April 2008, September 2008, February 2009 and August 2010.

**Q.6 CONTINUED...**

	<u>More important</u>	<u>Less important</u>	<u>Same</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
Jan 6-10, 2010	39	9	45	7
<b>Bush</b>				
January, 2008	19	27	46	8
January, 2007	32	16	43	9
January, 2006	30	14	47	9
January, 2005	34	9	47	10
Mid-January, 2004	34	9	49	8
January, 2003	52	6	35	7
January, 2002	54	4	36	6
<b>Clinton</b>				
January, 2000	16	22	53	9
January, 1999	27	16	51	6

**QUESTIONS 7, 10, 12A-12B, 14-16, 20-24, 30-38, 50-51, 54-55, 61-66 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**NO QUESTIONS 8-9, 11, 13, 17-19, 25-29, 39-49, 52-53, 56-60, 67-68**

**QUESTIONS 12CF1-12JF2 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL:**

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

**ASK IF INDEP/NO PREF/OTHER/DK/REF (PARTY=3,4,5,9):**

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	<b>(VOL.) No preference</b>	<b>(VOL.) Other party</b>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>	<u>Lean Rep</u>	<u>Lean Dem</u>
Jan 7-11, 2015	21	30	44	3	1	1	19	18
Dec 3-7, 2014	24	31	39	3	1	2	17	17
Nov 6-9, 2014	27	32	36	2	*	1	15	16
Oct 15-20, 2014	24	33	38	4	*	1	13	17
Sep 2-9, 2014	24	33	38	3	1	2	15	15
Aug 20-24, 2014	24	31	37	4	1	4	15	16
Jul 8-14, 2014	25	34	37	2	1	1	16	15
Apr 23-27, 2014	24	30	41	2	1	2	18	17
Jan 23-Mar 16, 2014	22	31	41	3	1	2	17	17
Feb 14-23, 2014	22	32	39	4	1	2	14	17
Jan 15-19, 2014	21	31	41	3	1	2	18	16
<b>Yearly Totals</b>								
2014	23.2	31.5	39.5	3.1	.7	2.0	16.2	16.5
2013	23.9	32.1	38.3	2.9	.5	2.2	16.0	16.0
2012	24.7	32.6	36.4	3.1	.5	2.7	14.4	16.1
2011	24.3	32.3	37.4	3.1	.4	2.5	15.7	15.6
2010	25.2	32.7	35.2	3.6	.4	2.8	14.5	14.1
2009	23.9	34.4	35.1	3.4	.4	2.8	13.1	15.7
2008	25.7	36.0	31.5	3.6	.3	3.0	10.6	15.2
2007	25.3	32.9	34.1	4.3	.4	2.9	10.9	17.0
2006	27.8	33.1	30.9	4.4	.3	3.4	10.5	15.1
2005	29.3	32.8	30.2	4.5	.3	2.8	10.3	14.9
2004	30.0	33.5	29.5	3.8	.4	3.0	11.7	13.4
2003	30.3	31.5	30.5	4.8	.5	2.5	12.0	12.6
2002	30.4	31.4	29.8	5.0	.7	2.7	12.4	11.6
2001	29.0	33.2	29.5	5.2	.6	2.6	11.9	11.6
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	27.3	34.4	30.9	5.1	.6	1.7	12.1	13.5
2000	28.0	33.4	29.1	5.5	.5	3.6	11.6	11.7

2

In 1999-2007 and 2010-2011, question began "Now thinking about Barack Obama's/George W. Bush's/Bill Clinton's upcoming State of the Union address ...." In 2008, 2012 and 2013 question began "As you may know, George W. Bush/Barack Obama will give his annual State of the Union address in a few weeks ...."

## PARTY/PARTYLN CONTINUED...

				(VOL.)	(VOL.)	(VOL.)	Lean	Lean
	Republican	Democrat	Independent	No preference	Other party	DK/Ref	Rep	Dem
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9	13.0	14.5
1998	27.9	33.7	31.1	4.6	.4	2.3	11.6	13.1
1997	28.0	33.4	32.0	4.0	.4	2.3	12.2	14.1
1996	28.9	33.9	31.8	3.0	.4	2.0	12.1	14.9
1995	31.6	30.0	33.7	2.4	.6	1.3	15.1	13.5
1994	30.1	31.5	33.5	1.3	--	3.6	13.7	12.2
1993	27.4	33.6	34.2	4.4	1.5	2.9	11.5	14.9
1992	27.6	33.7	34.7	1.5	0	2.5	12.6	16.5
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	0	1.4	3.0	14.7	10.8
1990	30.9	33.2	29.3	1.2	1.9	3.4	12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34	--	--	--	--	--
1987	26	35	39	--	--	--	--	--

## QUESTIONS REPJOB-DEMJOB PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

## ASK ALL:

TEAPARTY2 From what you know, do you agree or disagree with the Tea Party movement, or don't you have an opinion either way?

	Agree	Disagree	No opinion either way	(VOL.) Haven't heard of	(VOL.) Refused	Not heard of/DK
Jan 7-11, 2015	17	27	52	2	1	--
Jan 23-Mar 16, 2014	18	28	51	1	2	--
Oct 9-13, 2013	19	32	46	2	2	--
Jul 17-21, 2013	18	25	52	4	1	--
Jun 12-16, 2013	22	29	46	2	2	--
May 23-26, 2013	17	20	56	3	4	--
Feb 14-17, 2013	19	26	52	2	1	--
Dec 5-9, 2012	18	29	50	2	1	--
Oct 31-Nov 3, 2012 (RVs)	19	29	47	1	3	--
Oct 4-7, 2012	19	25	52	2	2	--
Sep 12-16, 2012	18	26	53	2	2	--
Jul 16-26, 2012	16	27	54	2	1	--
Jun 28-Jul 9, 2012	19	27	49	3	2	--
Jun 7-17, 2012	21	25	52	2	1	--
May 9-Jun 3, 2012	16	25	54	2	3	--
Apr 4-15, 2012	20	26	50	3	2	--
Mar 7-11, 2012	19	29	48	2	2	--
Feb 8-12, 2012	18	25	53	2	2	--
Jan 11-16, 2012	20	24	52	2	2	--
Jan 4-8, 2012	18	25	52	2	3	--
Dec 7-11, 2011	19	27	50	2	2	--
Nov 9-14, 2011	20	27	51	1	1	--
Sep 22-Oct 4, 2011	19	27	51	2	1	--
Aug 17-21, 2011	20	27	50	1	1	--
Jul 20-24, 2011	20	24	53	1	1	--
Jun 15-19, 2011	20	26	50	3	2	--
May 25-30, 2011	18	23	54	2	2	--
Mar 30-Apr 3, 2011	22	29	47	1	1	--
Mar 8-14, 2011	19	25	54	1	1	--
Feb 22-Mar 1, 2011	20	25	52	2	2	--
Feb 2-7, 2011 <sup>3</sup>	22	22	53	2	2	--

<sup>3</sup> In the February 2-7, 2011, survey and before, question read "...do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the Tea Party movement..." In October 2010 and earlier, question was asked only of those who had heard or read a lot or a little about the Tea Party. In May 2010 through October 2010, it was described as: "the Tea Party movement that has been involved in campaigns and protests in the U.S. over the past year." In March 2010 it was described as "the Tea Party protests that have taken place in the U.S. over the past year."

## TEAPARTY2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>No opinion either way</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>Haven't heard of</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>Refused</u>	<i>Not heard of/ DK</i>
Jan 5-9, 2011	24	22	50	2	1	--
Dec 1-5, 2010	22	26	49	2	2	--
Nov 4-7, 2010	27	22	49	1	1	--
Oct 27-30, 2010 (RVs)	29	25	32	--	1	13
Oct 13-18, 2010 (RVs)	28	24	30	--	1	16
Aug 25-Sep 6, 2010 (RVs)	29	26	32	--	1	13
Jul 21-Aug 5, 2010	22	18	37	--	1	21
Jun 16-20, 2010	24	18	30	--	*	27
May 20-23, 2010	25	18	31	--	1	25
Mar 11-21, 2010	24	14	29	--	1	31