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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
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Health Care Debate Continues to Top News Interest
MEDIA LESS INFLUENTIAL IN VIEWS ON HEALTH CARE, ECONOMY
THAN ON OTHER ISSUES

The first week of fall brought little change to the public’s news agenda with the debate over health care reform continuing to top public interest. However, the news media play much less of a role in shaping views of health care reform and the economy – where personal experiences are an important factor – than they do on environmental issues and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

More than four-in-ten (42%) name the health care debate as the single news story they followed more closely than any other last week, far more than mention reports about the condition of the U.S. economy (19%). Public interest in health care has been stable over recent weeks, consistently eclipsing interest in other news stories.

When asked what is most important in helping them to form opinions on health care, 41% cite what they have heard or read in the media as most important; only somewhat fewer cite personal experiences (31%), while another 25% say that talking with friends and family is most important. Similarly, nearly as many people say that personal experiences are most important in helping them form opinions about the economy (35%) as cite the media (41%), with 23% mentioning talking with friends and family.

	What’s Important to You in Forming Opinions On ...			
	What you see or read in the media %	Personal experiences %	Talking with friends and family %	Other/ DK %
Iraq and Afghanistan	61	15	22	2=100
Environmental issues	57	19	19	5=100
The economy	41	35	23	2=100
Health care reform	41	31	25	3=100

Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Q.4a-d.

By contrast, clear majorities say the media is most important in helping them form opinions about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (61%) and environmental issues such as global climate change (57%), while far fewer cite personal experiences as being most important (15% for Iraq and Afghanistan, 19% for environmental issues). In each case, about one-in-five cite talking with family and friends as most important (22% Iraq and Afghanistan, 19% environment).

Older Americans Rely More on Media

Americans age 65 and older are generally more likely than other age groups to say what they see or read in the media is most important to their opinions. For example, 73% of older Americans say they rely most on the media to inform their opinions about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. By comparison, 64% of those ages 40-64 say the media is most important in helping them form opinions on the wars; and among those 18-39, even fewer (50%) say media is the most important factor in shaping their views of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A similar age pattern is seen across the other three items tested – health care, the economy and the environment.

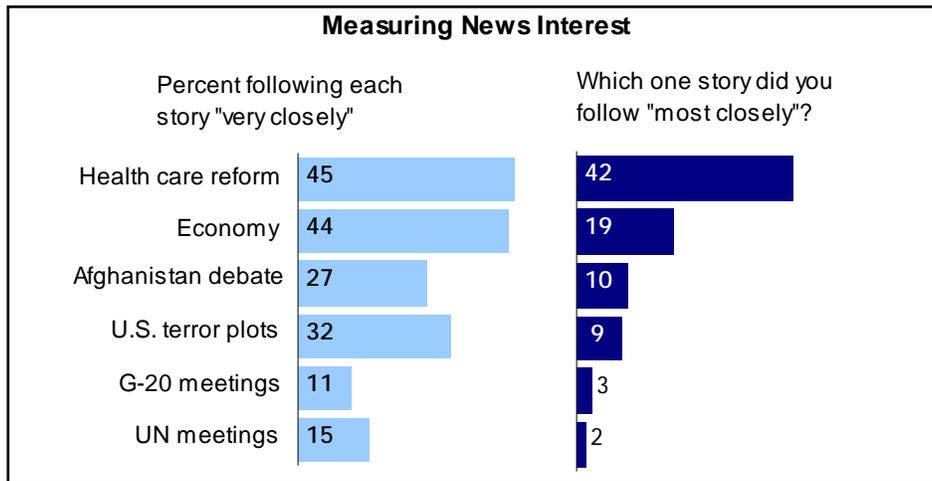
Older Americans Rely More on Media			
<i>Iraq and Afghanistan opinions formed by:</i>			
	<u>Friends/ Personal experiences</u>	<u>What you see or read in the media</u>	<u>Other/ DK</u>
	%	%	%
18-39	49	50	2=100
40-64	33	64	3=100
65+	23	73	4=100

Figures may not round to 100% because of rounding.
Q.4b.

There are only modest partisan differences in views of the factors that help shape opinions on these issues. However, a notable exception is opinion on environmental issues such as global climate change. While about two-thirds of Democrats (68%) cite media as most important in helping them form opinions on environmental issues, fewer independents (55%) and Republicans (50%) say this.

The Week's Other News

More than four-in-ten (44%) paid very close attention to reports about the condition of the U.S. economy last week, while 19% named it their top story. While about as many paid very close attention to the economy as health care reform, far fewer named the economy as their most closely followed story (19% economy, 42% health care).



The debate over whether to send more troops to Afghanistan was followed very closely by 27% of the public with 10% calling it their top story of the week. News about recent terrorist plots in the United States received about the same amount of attention: 32% followed this story very closely and 9% said it was the story they followed more closely than any other.

The public paid relatively little attention to two major international events hosted by the U.S. last week. Some 15% paid very close attention to the United Nations meetings in New York, while 11% very closely followed the G-20 economic meetings in Pittsburgh. Just 2% and 3% named the UN meetings and the G-20 meetings their top story, respectively. Interest was low, despite robust news coverage. According to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, the United Nations meetings were the top media story of the week, filling 10% of the news hole; and coverage of the G-20 cracked the top 10 accounting for 5% of the newshole.

Southeast Floods, Iran Nuclear Facility Register With Public

More than four-in-ten say they have heard a lot about news that Iran has built a covert nuclear facility (45%) and recent flooding in the Southeast (44%). Awareness of the Southeast floods was especially high in the affected region of the country, with 54% of those in the South hearing a lot about the story.

What the Public's Hearing About ...			
	A lot %	A little %	Nothing/ Don't know %
News Iran has built a covert nuclear facility	45	33	23=100
Recent flooding in the Southeast	44	36	20=100
Reports about a new AIDS vaccine	23	44	33=100
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Q3a-c.			

Fewer heard a lot about reports about a new AIDS vaccine (23%); 44% heard a little about this news, while 33% heard nothing at all.

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, data relating to news coverage were collected from September 21-27, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected September 25-28, 2009 from a nationally representative sample of 1,004 adults.

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 landline 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 25-28, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1004

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	44	37	10	10	*
September 18-21, 2009	44	34	15	7	*
September 11-14, 2009	45	32	14	9	*
September 3-6, 2009	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	*

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>
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	*
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	*

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, 1994	27	40	20	12	1
June, 1994	25	42	23	10	*
May, 1994	33	40	16	10	1
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	45	31	12	12	0
September 18-21, 2009	44	26	19	11	*
September 11-14, 2009	44	27	14	15	*
September 3-6, 2009	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	*

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>
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
June, 1993	28	38	19	15	*
May, 1993	30	30	25	14	1
c. The debate over whether to send more troops to Afghanistan					
September 18-21, 2009 ²	27	40	17	16	*
September 11-14, 2009	26	33	25	16	*
September 3-6, 2009	25	35	22	18	1
September 3-6, 2009	23	33	23	21	0
August 21-24, 2009	14	32	26	28	1
August 7-10, 2009	24	32	23	21	1
March 20-23, 2009	24	32	22	22	*
February 20-23, 2009	27	29	24	19	1
January 30-February 2, 2009	26	34	24	16	*
January 2-4, 2009	22	33	23	21	1
October 24-27, 2008	28	32	22	17	1
October 10-13, 2008	19	34	29	18	*
September 12-15, 2008	21	34	25	19	1
August 29-31, 2008	18	27	32	23	*
July 18-21, 2008	27	33	24	16	*
July 11-14, 2008	19	28	29	23	1
July 3-7, 2008	19	28	32	21	*
June 20-23, 2008	20	30	30	20	*
Late July, 2002	41	38	13	7	1
June, 2002	38	32	20	9	1
April, 2002	39	39	13	8	1
Early April, 2002	45	37	12	5	1
February, 2002	47	39	8	5	1
January, 2002	51	35	9	4	1
December, 2001	44	38	12	5	1
Mid-November, 2001	49	36	11	3	1
Early November, 2001	45	36	12	6	1
Mid-October, 2001	51	35	10	3	1
d. News about recent terrorist plots in the United States					
	32	38	17	14	0
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
September 7-10, 2007: <i>German officials stopping a terrorist plot to bomb several locations, including a U.S. military base in Germany</i>	20	27	23	28	2

² 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." All other dates asked about "The U.S. military effort in Afghanistan."

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>
May 11-14, 2007: <i>The arrest of six men charged with plotting an attack on the Fort Dix Army base</i>	19	29	20	31	1
August 9-13, 2006: <i>British officials stopping a terrorist plot to blow up planes flying to the U.S.</i>	54	26	9	9	2
August 2004: <i>The recent “code orange” alert about the increased risk of a terrorist attack</i>	34	36	18	11	1
Mid-January, 2004	35	38	16	10	1
February, 2003	39	35	16	9	1
Early September, 2002: <i>The Homeland Security office issuing a “code orange” alert about the increased risk of a terrorist attack</i>	39	29	16	15	1
July, 2002: <i>Defending against terrorist attacks in the U.S.</i>	51	33	9	6	1
June, 2002: <i>The arrest of a man for planning a “dirty bomb” terrorist attack on the U.S.</i>	30	30	24	15	1
June, 2002: <i>Defending against terrorist attacks in the U.S.</i>	45	35	12	7	1
April, 2002	46	36	10	7	1
Early April, 2002	49	35	10	5	1
December, 2001 ³	60	29	7	3	1
Mid-November, 2001	66	25	6	2	1
Early November, 2001	63	26	6	3	2
Mid-October, 2001	78	16	4	1	1
Early October, 2001	73	22	4	1	*
Mid-September, 2001	74	22	3	1	*
January, 2000: <i>The recent arrests of suspected terrorists in the U.S.</i>	23	36	23	17	1
e. The United Nations meetings in New York	15	29	23	33	*
f. The G-20 economic meetings in Pittsburgh	11	25	24	40	*

³ From Mid-October 2001 to December 2001 the story was listed as “Terrorism attacks on the United States.” In Early October 2001 and Mid-September 2001 the story was listed as “News about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington?”

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.]

- 42 Debate over health care reform
- 19 Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
- 10 The debate over whether to send more troops to Afghanistan
- 9 News about recent terrorist plots in the United States
- 3 The G-20 economic meetings in Pittsburgh
- 2 The United Nations meetings in New York
- 6 Some other story (VOL.)
- 7 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.3 How much if anything, have you heard about each of the following? Have you heard a lot, a little or nothing at all? [READ AND RANDOMIZE]

		<u>A lot</u>	<u>A little</u>	<u>Nothing at all</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>
a.	News Iran has built a covert nuclear facility	45	33	23	*
	TREND FOR COMPARISON:				
	September, 2006: <i>The dispute about Iran's nuclear program</i>	41	44	14	1
	February, 2006	32	46	21	1
b.	Reports about a new AIDS vaccine	23	44	33	*
c.	Recent flooding in the Southeast	44	36	20	0

Q.4 What is most important to you in helping you form opinions about [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]

		<u>Talking with friends and family</u>	<u>Personal experiences</u>	<u>What you see or read in the media</u>	<u>(VOL.) Other</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK</u>
a.	Health care reform	25	31	41	1	2
b.	The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan	22	15	61	*	2
c.	Environmental issues, such as global climate change	19	19	57	1	4
d.	The economy	23	35	41	*	2