Medicare
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Thought this might be of interest.

Humphrey Taylor

cc: Bruce Reed, Elena K, Gene Sperling, Tom Freedman Jeanne Lambrew — & return to me — Thks — Sarah

The Harris Poll

THE HARRIS POLL #6
Wednesday, February 4, 1998

STRONG SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT'S PROPOSAL ALLOWING SOME PEOPLE AGED 55-64 TO BUY INTO MEDICARE, ALTHOUGH MAJORITY DO NOT BELIEVE IT WOULD BE SELF-FINANCING

Only 54% of the public have heard about the proposal.

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by Humphrey Taylor

The president's proposal to allow some people aged 55-64 to buy into the Medicare health insurance program is popular with most people who have heard about it. And the two main elements of the proposal, allowing retired workers aged 62 to 64, and laid-off workers aged 55 to 64, to buy into Medicare are strongly supported by most people, whether or not they have heard about the proposal. The majority support the proposals even though – by an equally large majority – most people do not believe the president's claim that it will be paid for in full by those insured. They believe that the government and taxpayers will eventually pay a substantial part of the cost.

Some of the major findings of this Harris survey, conducted among a nationwide survey of 1,000 adults between January 14 and 18, 1998 are:

- Just over half of all adults (54%) say they have seen, heard or read about the president's proposal to allow some people aged 55 to 64 to buy into Medicare.

- Among this 54% who have heard about it, a substantial 63%-28% favor it. A virtually identical 63%-26% of people aged 55 to 64 feel this way.

- A substantial 68%-27% majority of the public (and a 67%-29% of those who have heard about the proposal) support the proposal "that people aged 62 to 64 who have retired should be allowed to buy into Medicare if they pay the full cost."

- A virtually identical 67%-29% majority also supports the proposal to "allow laid-off workers aged 55 to 64 to buy into Medicare" if they also pay the full cost.

- A majority of the public accepts one criticism of the plan (by 68%-29%) that "the government and taxpayers will eventually pay a substantial part of the cost."

- However, only a 44% minority agrees with another criticism that "this is an undesirable increase in the government's involvement with health insurance."

The survey is not large enough to provide accurate data about how many people might actually buy into Medicare if these proposals become law. However, it suggests that the number would be small. Only about one out of every five people aged 55 to 65 does not have health insurance now, and only about a quarter of those without health insurance (i.e. 4% of all people aged 55 to 64) say they would buy it.

Nevertheless, the poll suggests that, at least initially, the president's proposals sound attractive to most people, whether or not they have heard about them.

Humphrey Taylor is the Chairman and CEO of Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.

TABLE 1

SEEN, HEARD, READ ABOUT PRESIDENT'S PLAN TO ALLOW PEOPLE TO BUY INTO MEDICARE

Base: All Adults

"President Clinton has proposed that some people aged 55 to 64, who wish to do so, should be able to buy into the Medicare health insurance program for the elderly. Have you seen, read or heard about this proposal or not?"

	Total %	People Aged 55-64 %
Seen, read or heard about it	54	75
Not done so	46	25

TABLE 2

SUPPORT/OPPOSE PRESIDENT'S PROPOSAL

Base: Seen, read or heard about President Clinton's plan

"On balance, do you support or oppose this idea?"

	Total %	People Aged 55-64 %
Support	63	63
Oppose	28	26
Don't know/Refused	9	11

TABLE 3

SUPPORT/OPPOSE ALLOWING RETIRED WORKERS AGED 62-64 TO BUY INTO MEDICARE

Base: All Adults

"Under this proposal, people aged 62 to 64 **who have retired** would be allowed to buy into Medicare if they paid the full cost, so that it would not increase the cost of the Medicare program to taxpayers. Do you support or oppose this idea?"

	Adults %	Familiar with Clinton's Proposal %	People Aged 55-64 %
Support	68	67	56
Oppose	27	29	39
Don't know/Refused	5	3	5

TABLE 4

SUPPORT/OPPOSE ALLOWING LAID-OFF WORKERS AGED 55-64 TO BUY INTO MEDICARE

Base: All Adults

"Another part of the proposal would allow **laid-off workers** aged 55 to 64 to buy into Medicare, also paying the full cost so that there would be no cost to the taxpayers. Do you support or oppose this idea?"

	Adults %	Familiar with Clinton's Proposal %	People Aged 55-64 %
Support	67	68	61
Oppose	29	29	36
Don't know/Refused	3	3	3

TABLE 5

AGREE/DISAGREE WITH TWO CRITICISMS OF PRESIDENT'S PROPOSALS

Base: All Adults

"Critics of the proposal make two points, please tell me if you agree or disagree with them."

AGED 55-64		TOTAL			PEOPLE		
		Agree Disagree	Disagree Sure	Not Sure	Agree		Not
This is an undesirable increase of the government's involvement with health insurance	%	44	52	4	42	47	10
Even though the president denies it, the government and taxpayers will eventually pay a substantial part of the costs	%	68	29	3	72	21	7

TABLE 6

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE OR DO NOT HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE

Base: Aged 55 to 64

"Do you have health insurance or not?"

	Total %
Yes, have	81
Do not have	19

NOTE: Approximately **one-third of those without health insurance say they would buy it** if it cost "$5,000 a year or just over $400 a month." **However, this is based on a very small sample and should be treated with great caution.**

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted by telephone within the United States between January 14 to 18, among a nationwide cross section of 1,000 adults. Figures for age, sex, race, education and number of adults in household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

In theory, with a sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is difficult or impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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Contact Louis Harris and Associates, Inc. 111 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003, (212) 539-9697, for complete demographic details for the questions in this release.

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