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PUBLIC INITIALLY SUPPORTS MEDICARE LAW BUT QUICKLY SHOWS ITS DOUBTS

The American public starts out strongly in favor of the new Medicare prescription drug law, but becomes very uncertain when presented with arguments about it sure to be raised in the coming political campaign, the University of Pennsylvania's National Annenberg Election Survey shows.

A solid majority of the 1,615 adults questioned on the issue since President Bush signed the law on December 8, said they favored the bill, which was described to them as "a Medicare bill which among other things provides prescription drug coverage for senior citizens and allows private companies to provide some Medicare services." Sixty-three percent said they favored it, while 25 percent said they did not. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus two percentage points.

But then each group was confronted with arguments against its position. Those who favored the law were told "Some people say the prescription drug coverage benefits won't help many seniors very much and cutting costs by bringing in private companies will eventually destroy Medicare. Considering that, do you still favor the bill or are you uncertain?" Of the original 63 percent in favor, only 21 percent stuck to that position. Thirty-eight percent said they were uncertain, two percent said they were now opposed and another two percent had no position.

Opposition also weakened, although not by as much. The opponents were told "Some people say the drug benefit is an important first step and the cost-cutting measures are essential for Medicare to survive. Considering that, do you still oppose this bill or are you uncertain?" Of the initial 25 percent who were opposed, 15 percent confirmed their opposition. Nine percent said they were uncertain. About half of one percent now said they favored the bill and one percent had no position.

In the end, more people still favored the bill than opposed it. But 47 percent were uncertain, compared to 22 percent in favor and 18 percent opposed.

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The only age cohort where less than a majority supported the bill to begin with was those whom it would affect soonest, respondents 65 and over. Forty-six percent favored the bill and 40 percent opposed it. After the followup questions, 40 percent were uncertain, 26 percent opposed the law, and 16 percent favored it.

In contrast, respondents 18 to 29 initially favored it, 73 percent to 14 percent. But they, too shifted – after the follow-up questions -- to 55 percent uncertain, 21 percent in favor and nine percent opposed.

Women shifted from initial 69 to 20 percent support to a majority that was uncertain. After the follow-ups, 54 percent of women were uncertain, 18 percent favored the bill and 14 percent opposed it. Among men, who started out in favor by a narrower 57 to 31 percent margin, the drop off to uncertainty was not as severe. After the follow-ups, 39 percent of men were uncertain, 25 percent were in favor and 22 percent were opposed.

Democrats and Republicans were each initially supportive. Republicans at first backed the law by a 73 to 18 percent majority. Democrats, whose representatives in Congress voted heavily against the bill, backed it by a 59 to 28 percent majority.

After the follow-ups, Republican support dropped 40 percentage points, to 33 percent in favor, with 13 percent opposed and 42 percent uncertain. Democratic support dropped 46 points, to 13 percent in favor, 21 percent opposed and 51 percent uncertain. Independents went from initial 61 to 28 percent to 49 percent uncertain, 21 percent in favor and 17 percent opposed.

That National Annenberg Election Survey is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania (www.appcpenn.org). It has been tracking the presidential campaign since October, and interviewing will continue until after Election Day. Dr. Kathleen Hall Jamieson is the director of the survey. Ken Winneg is the managing director of the survey. Adam Clymer is the political director of the survey.

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Questions

Those who said they did not know or did not answer are not included in charts below.

A. President Bush has signed a Medicare bill which among other things provides prescription drug coverage for senior citizens and allows private companies to provide some Medicare services. From what you have heard or read do you favor or oppose this bill? **IF FAVOR:** Is that strongly favor or somewhat favor. **IF OPPOSE:** Is that strongly oppose or somewhat oppose?

	Percent
Favor	63%
Oppose	25%

B. (Asked only of the 63% who said they favored the bill) Some people say the prescription drug coverage benefits won't help many seniors very much and cutting costs by bringing in private companies will eventually destroy Medicare. Considering that do you still favor the bill or are you uncertain?

	Percent
Favor	33%
Uncertain	60%
Oppose*	4%

*Volunteered

C. (Asked only of the 25% who said they opposed the bill) Some people say the drug benefit is an important first step and the cost-cutting measures are essential for Medicare to survive. Considering that, do you still oppose this bill, or are you uncertain?

	Percent
Oppose	60%
Uncertain	36%
Favor*	2%

*Volunteered

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Survey Methodology

The National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) is a survey conducted each presidential election year by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. The 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey is based on telephone interviews which began October 7, 2003 and will continue past Election Day.

The sample of telephone exchanges called was randomly selected by a computer from a complete list of thousands of active residential exchanges across the country. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. Within each household, one adult was designated by a random procedure to be the respondent for the survey. The interviewing is conducted by Schulman, Ronca, Bucuvalas, Inc.

The results have been weighted to take account of household size and number of telephone lines into the residence and to adjust for variation in the sample relating to geographic region, sex, race, age and education.

This report deals with interviewing conducted from Dec. 8 through 23, when 1,615 people were questioned about Medicare. In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results will differ by no more than two percentage points, up or down, from what would have been obtained by interviewing all American adults. For smaller subgroups, the margin of sampling error would be higher.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.

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