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Convention Increases America's Appetite for News About the Presidential Race Low Ratings Do Not Equate to Lack of Interest in Presidential Campaign

(Philadelphia, PA) Despite the fact that over half of all Americans watched only a few minutes or less of the Republican National Convention, the convention increased interest in network and cable news coverage of the presidential campaign and awareness of George W. Bush's policy positions, according to a new study released today by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

The Annenberg researchers found the convention increased the amount of attention Americans paid to the presidential campaign, even for those who rarely follow politics. From mid-July to early August, among those who follow politics 'some of the time' the percentage who paid attention to news about the presidential race went from 30 to 60 percent. For those who follow politics 'hardly at all' the percentages also doubled, going from 15 to 30 percent during the same period.

"News coverage of the conventions plays an important role in motivating Americans to seek information about the presidential candidates," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication of the University of Pennsylvania and Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center. "Convention coverage contributed increases in knowledge about the candidates' policy positions."

Among the findings:

- Eight percent learned that Bush favors a larger tax cut than Al Gore. When asked who favors a larger tax cut, 54 percent of Americans correctly identified Bush in the weeks leading up to the convention. In the week after the convention 62 percent correctly identified Bush.
- While knowledge of Gore's position on abortion remained relatively flat over the month, in the week after the convention, more Americans knew Bush favors making it harder for a woman to get an abortion than they did before the convention. Ten percent of those who follow politics 'just some of the time' learned Bush's position during that time.
- More Americans learned about Gore's opposition to allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market and Bush's support for such a proposal. The increase in awareness was greater among Americans less attentive to politics than those who follow politics regularly.

The Annenberg 2000 Survey is the largest survey of the American electorate ever conducted. By the end of 2000, over 100,000 interviews will have been completed on Americans' political knowledge, media use, and opinions about candidates and issues. Reports are being released regularly. Margin of error for a weekly average is +/- 3.5%. The full report is available on the Annenberg Public Policy Center website, appcpenn.org.

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The Annenberg Public Policy Center was established by publisher and philanthropist Walter Annenberg in 1994 to create a community of scholars within the University of Pennsylvania that would examine the role of communications in public policy issues at the local, state and federal levels. The Center has four ongoing research foci: Information and Society; Media and the Developing Mind; Media and the Dialogue of Democracy; Health Communications. The Annenberg Public Policy Center supports research and sponsors lectures and conferences in these areas.