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W A S H I N G T O N

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**Undecided Voters Most Likely to Get Candidates' Positions Wrong –
By Filling In Knowledge Gaps, Upcoming Debates Could Solidify
Undecideds' Choice for President**

With over half of all Americans unable to identify Al Gore and George W. Bush's positions on issues ranging from the economy to health care to education to crime, the debates that begin tomorrow night could play a major role in deciding the outcome of this election, according to new research released by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

The Annenberg 2000 Survey – the largest survey of the American electorate ever conducted – found that registered voters who have made up their minds on whom to vote for are more knowledgeable on the candidates' positions than registered undecided and uncertain voters (those who are open to changing their mind).

“Many of those who can correctly identify the candidates' position on a variety of issues know who they are going to vote for. While many of those who get the positions wrong or don't know are more likely to be undecided,” said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication and Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center. “With the election so close, by helping the undecideds better understand where these candidates stand on the issues, the debates can play a major role in determining the outcome of this election.”

The Annenberg researchers found that less than half of all Americans know: Gore's position on the death penalty, Bush's position on handgun licenses, Gore's position on investment of Social Security contributions, Gore's position on school vouchers, Bush's position on health insurance for every child and either candidate's position on soft-money contributions and allowing patients to sue HMOs. The majority of Americans do know both candidates' positions on abortion and gays in the military.

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Since the August convention, knowledge of some of the candidates' issue positions has actually slipped, particularly knowledge of Gore's positions, while knowledge has grown on other issues. Compared with the end of August, slightly more today know Bush favors and Gore opposes school vouchers. And slightly more know Bush favors and Gore opposes abortion restrictions. But, since August, slightly fewer know Gore favors allowing HMO suits and licensing handgun owners; slightly fewer know Gore wants to develop a government health insurance program to make sure all children are covered; and slightly fewer know Gore favors the death penalty.

When asked to contrast the candidate's positions on key issues, less than half of all Americans knew which candidate was offering a \$3,000 tax credit for long term health care (Gore) and which candidate wanted to pay down the national debt the most (Gore). Only one in three Americans knew which candidate wanted to double the per-child tax credit (Bush). And while over half of Americans know which candidate favored the biggest increase in spending in social security (Gore) and who favored the biggest tax cut (Bush), more than one in three Americans did not know the candidates' position on these two issues.

"Exposure equals knowledge in some cases, neither the long term care tax credit or child care credits have been featured in ads and neither has received extensive news coverage," added Jamieson.

The Annenberg 2000 Survey will be the largest survey of the American electorate ever conducted. By the end of 2000, over 100,000 interviews will have been conducted on Americans' political knowledge, media use, and opinions about candidates and issues. Reports will be released regularly. Margin of error for a weekly average is +/- 3.5%. The full report can be found on www.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.