
MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Jeffrey Pollock & Jim Lee
RE: Pennsylvania Health Care Survey
DATE: October 1, 2007

Health care is a top concern for Pennsylvania voters – with access and cost as the primary causes of that concern. At this point, just about one quarter of voters is familiar with Governor Ed Rendell’s plan to lower the cost of premiums and increase access to quality, affordable healthcare coverage for uninsured individuals by encouraging more employers to either provide it, or pay a 3% payroll tax to help fund a program where individuals and employees with no insurance could purchase it themselves. Once voters are read a description of the plan, however, a strong majority supports it – including a majority of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. Underlying voters’ support for the Governor’s plan is voters’ support for the Governor himself, as six in 10 voters approve of his job performance.

KEY FINDINGS

- The top two issues—out of eight—on which voters want state elected officials in Harrisburg to work are “reducing property taxes” (21%) and “increasing access to affordable health insurance” (21%). Increasing access to affordable health insurance ranked higher than creating jobs (13%), improving education (14%) or fixing roads and bridges (7%), all front-burner issues competing for legislator’s time in Harrisburg lately.

- More importantly, when voters are asked more specifically which health care issues are most important, the top two responses are “the cost of health insurance paid by employers and individuals” (23%) and “the number of people with no health insurance coverage” (22%). Since both controlling health care premiums and expanding coverage to the uninsured are the primary tenets of the Rendell Administration’s proposal, this shows that the governor is in sync with public opinion.
- Most voters do not give above average marks to the current health care system.
 - One third of voters rate Pennsylvania’s health care system as either excellent (3%) or good (31%), while a solid majority rates it as only fair (42%) or poor (18%).
 - There is near universal concern (90%) about the rising cost of premiums.
 - Among all voters, those who receive the most blame for the problems with the system are insurance companies (39%). This emphasis on insurance companies is important because it suggests voters are looking for increased oversight.
- A near majority of voters (49%) believes the government should regulate the cost of health insurance premiums in the same way it regulates premiums for homeowners and automobile insurance. Only about one-third (35%) believes premiums should continue to be dictated by the private, open market, while 16% are unsure. This is a clear indication most people believe the open, free market system has not been an effective way to control the cost of premiums in recent years, and they are looking for more government intervention if it means something can be done about out-of-control premium increases.
- When voters are told about the different approaches various states are using to tackle problems with healthcare, more voters say they are interested in pursuing private sector options for lowering costs and expanding health care to more uninsured people than in instituting a single- payer system model used in countries like Canada or Germany (which only received 37% support). For instance, more than one quarter (or 28%) want to work through the private sector to lower the costs of coverage and encourage employers to provide insurance.

- However, just 17% say they support the expansion of tax incentives so individuals can be empowered to purchase insurance themselves on the open, private market. This suggests that support is lukewarm at best for the kinds of tax incentives that President Bush and other protectors of the free market-based system have offered recently as alternatives to the status quo.

- About one quarter of voters (28%) is currently familiar with Governor Rendell’s health care plan, the Prescription for Pennsylvania. However, after hearing a description of the Governor’s plan, 66% of voters support it, while only 22% are opposed – a 3:1 margin. A majority of all subgroups supports the plan regardless of party affiliation, geographic region, gender, age group or education level– as shown in the table below.

Support for Health Care Plan	
<i>By key subgroups</i>	
Subgroup	
All Voters	66%
Philadelphia	82%
Phil Suburbs	71%
Northeast	62%
Central	64%
Allegheny	61%
West	59%
Men	64%
Women	68%
Democrat	75%
Independent	69%
Republican	54%
18-44	72%
45-64	66%
65+	59%
HS or Less	68%
Some College	70%
College Grad	63%
Employed	70%
Not Employed	61%

- By a 2-to-1 margin (60%-30%), voters support the portion of the Governor’s plan which charges a 3% payroll tax for employers who not provide insurance to their employees as a way to fund a program for individuals to buy affordable insurance for themselves. By a better than 2-to-1 margin (65%-31%), voters support increasing taxes on tobacco products in order to help pay for health insurance for adults in the state.
- Even after voters hear the primary arguments that opponents make about the plan – namely that it puts too much control in the hands of bureaucrats and takes important medical decisions away from doctors, that it could lead to higher taxes and premiums, and that it would be too much of a financial burden for small businesses and result in some going out of business – the margin of support for the plan remained higher than 2:1 and above 60%.
- Six in 10 voters (60%) approve of the job Rendell is doing as Governor—a boon to the support levels for his health care plan. Rendell’s name is likely a primary driver of support for his health care plan, as many of the groups among whom Rendell has his strongest job approval numbers (Philadelphia, Democrats, women, and 18 to 44 year olds) are also the groups most likely to support the plan.
- By a 34%-16% margin, voters say they would be more likely to vote for a legislator who supports the governor’s plan. The remaining 43% say it will have no impact on their vote.

METHODOLOGY

- Global Strategy Group, in conjunction with Susquehanna Polling and Research, Inc., conducted a survey among 809 registered voters in Pennsylvania from September 12-17, 2007.
 - The margin of error at the 95% confidence level is $\pm 3.4\%$ on the sample of 809.
 - The margin of error is larger for sub-groups.