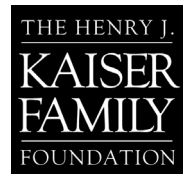




HARVARD  
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## Key Findings

Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health

# *The Public's Health Care Agenda for the 112th Congress*

January 2011

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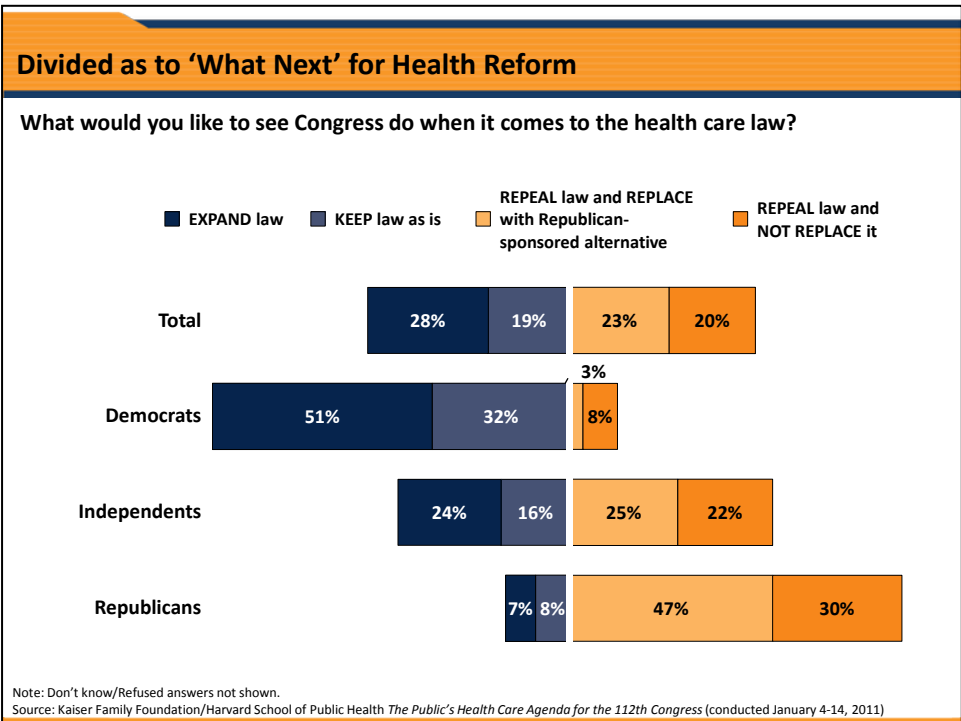
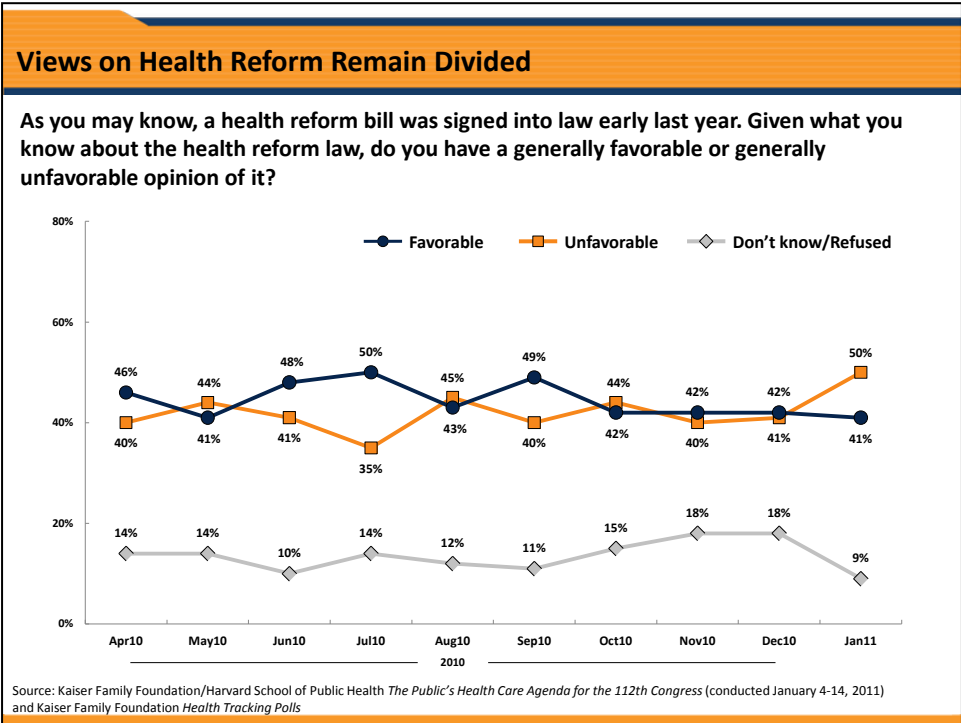
Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School Of Public Health  
 THE PUBLIC'S HEALTH CARE AGENDA FOR THE 112TH CONGRESS

Key Findings

HEALTH REFORM: VIEWS OF THE LAW AND WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT

While views of the health reform law remain roughly divided in January, negative views outstripped positive ones by a larger margin than they have in Kaiser tracking polls since the law passed last March. The share of the public with a favorable view of the law remained virtually unchanged from last month, but an uptick in unfavorable views (from 41 percent to 50 percent overall) was driven by independents. Forty-one percent of independents said they had an unfavorable view of the law in December; now this number is over half (57 percent), a change that may have been driven by the media spotlight afforded Republicans and anti-health reform arguments by the November elections and the plans for a repeal vote in the U.S. House.

When it comes to what lawmakers should do next on health reform, Americans' views are all over the map: 28 percent want to expand the law, 19 percent leave it as is, 23 percent repeal it and replace it with a Republican-sponsored alternative, and 20 percent repeal it and not replace it. But just like views of the law, opinions about what should happen next remain highly partisan. More than three in four Republicans (77 percent) back some form of repeal, while half of Democrats (51 percent) say they want the law expanded.



Most Americans—62 percent—disapprove of the idea of lawmakers using the appropriations process to slow down implementation of the law. The majority view switches here because, although most Republicans (57 percent) are in favor of the idea of defunding the bill, most independents are opposed (62 percent) along with the large majority of Democrats (84 percent). Even among those with an unfavorable view of the law and those who want to see it repealed, substantial shares of about four in ten say they disapprove of cutting off funding as a way to stop some or all of health reform from being put into place.

<b>SUPPORT FOR DEFUNDING HEALTH REFORM AMONG KEY GROUPS</b>								
<i>Q: Some lawmakers who oppose the health reform law say that if Congress isn't able to repeal the law, they should try to stop it from being put into place by cutting off funding to implement it. Whether or not you like the health reform law, would you say you approve or disapprove of cutting off funding as a way to stop some or all of health reform from being put into place?</i>								
	<b>All</b>	<b>Republicans</b>	<b>Independents</b>	<b>Democrats</b>	<b>Those with favorable view of law</b>	<b>Those with unfavorable view of law</b>	<b>Those who favor repeal</b>	<b>Those who would leave as is/expand</b>
Approve	33%	57%	32%	13%	11%	52%	56%	13%
Disapprove	62	38	62	84	88	41	38	85
DK/Ref.	6	6	6	3	1	7	6	2

Meanwhile, when it comes to the state lawsuits challenging the legality of the health reform law, Americans have mixed views as to their motivation. About a third (32 percent) say state leaders filing suit see the law as violating the constitution, but just as many (32 percent) say they think they are trying to gain political advantage. About two in ten (22 percent) say it's not about the law or about politics, but that lawmakers think the policy itself is bad for the country.

## HEALTH CARE AS A PRIORITY FOR THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS

The fact that the public is largely split on what should happen next with regards to the health reform law does not mean that they want Congress to stop working on health care. In fact, a surprisingly large proportion of Americans seem to be up for more discussion and action on health reform in the coming year. In an open-ended question, health care and the economy were the top two issues Americans say they want to see Congress and the president address this year. Health care was the top issue among Republicans, but it was also at the top, albeit more narrowly, for Democrats and independents. The deficit ranked third overall, and was prioritized by almost three times as many Republicans as Democrats.

<b>HEALTH CARE AND THE ECONOMY TOP THE PUBLIC'S POLICY AGENDA</b>				
<i>Q: Thinking about the new session of Congress that is starting this month, which two issues would you most like the president and Congress to act on in 2011?</i>				
	<b>Among All</b>	<b>Among Democrats</b>	<b>Among Independents</b>	<b>Among Republicans</b>
Health care/Health reform	46%	44%	46%	50%
Economy/jobs	40	41	41	39
Debt/deficit/balance budget/government spending	13	7	14	19
Immigration	12	12	11	11
Iraq/Afghanistan/concerns about military	8	10	7	6
Taxes	7	4	10	10
Social issues (gay rights, abortion)	6	5	7	5
Education	5	8	4	3
Social Security	3	4	3	2

*Note: Responses named by at least 3 percent shown. Numbers may add up to more than 100% because of multiple responses.*

Who makes up this large group of people who want Congress to prioritize health care? Three in ten are self-identified Republicans, but just as many are Democrats. They are not overwhelmingly in favor of repealing the reform law. Among this group prioritizing Congressional action on health care, nearly half want some version of repeal (26 percent want to replace the bill with a Republican alternative and 22 percent want to repeal it and not replace it), but 28 percent want to expand the legislation and 15 percent are content to leave it as it is. The emphasis on health reform may reflect the current attention it is receiving on Capitol Hill.

<b>WHO ARE THE PEOPLE PRIORITIZING HEALTH CARE THIS SESSION?</b>		
	<b>Among those who name health care one of top two issues</b>	<b>Among those NOT naming health care as one of top two issues</b>
<b>Percent who are...</b>		
Democrat	29%	31%
Republican	30	24
Independent	36	35
<b>Percent who have a...</b>		
Favorable view of law	36	45
Unfavorable view of law	57	45
<b>Percent who want to ...</b>		
Expand the law	28	29
Keep the law as is	15	21
Repeal and replace w/GOP alternative	26	21
Repeal and not replace	22	18

## CONCERNS ABOUT THE LAW PERSIST, BUT MANY COMPONENT PARTS STILL POPULAR

The public expresses a variety of concerns about the health care law. More than half believe it will entail too much government involvement in the health care system, a proportion that rises to 81 percent of Republicans and 57 percent of independents. Most Democrats, 58 percent, think it will lead to about the right amount of government involvement.

Despite the Congressional Budget Office's findings to the contrary<sup>1</sup>, six in ten Americans think the law will increase the deficit over the next ten years – up substantially from the 45 percent who believed this immediately post-passage. In fact, even among those with a favorable view of the law, four in ten believe it will increase the deficit, rising to 76 percent among those with an unfavorable view of the law.

A plurality of 42 percent think the law will weaken the Medicare trust fund, while 29 percent don't expect an impact, 18 percent think the trust fund will be strengthened and 12 percent don't know enough to say. Those over age 50 are somewhat more likely to anticipate harm to the trust fund: roughly half do, compared to just over a third of their younger compatriots.

But as we have seen throughout the debate over health care reform, while opinion on the law as a whole is divided, many of its component parts remain popular. Over three-quarters of the public feel favorably towards requiring drug makers to offer a 50 percent discount on brand-name drugs for people in the Medicare doughnut hole (85 percent), providing subsidies for low and moderate income Americans to buy health insurance (79 percent), and establishing a voluntary insurance program for long-term care services (76 percent) also known as the CLASS act. About two-thirds like that the law expands the Medicaid program, requires insurance companies that spend too little on health care services to give customers a rebate, and eliminates cost sharing for preventative services for Medicare enrollees, and about six in ten look favorably on provisions that provide bonuses to physicians providing primary care to Medicare recipients and reduce payments to Medicare Advantage plans.

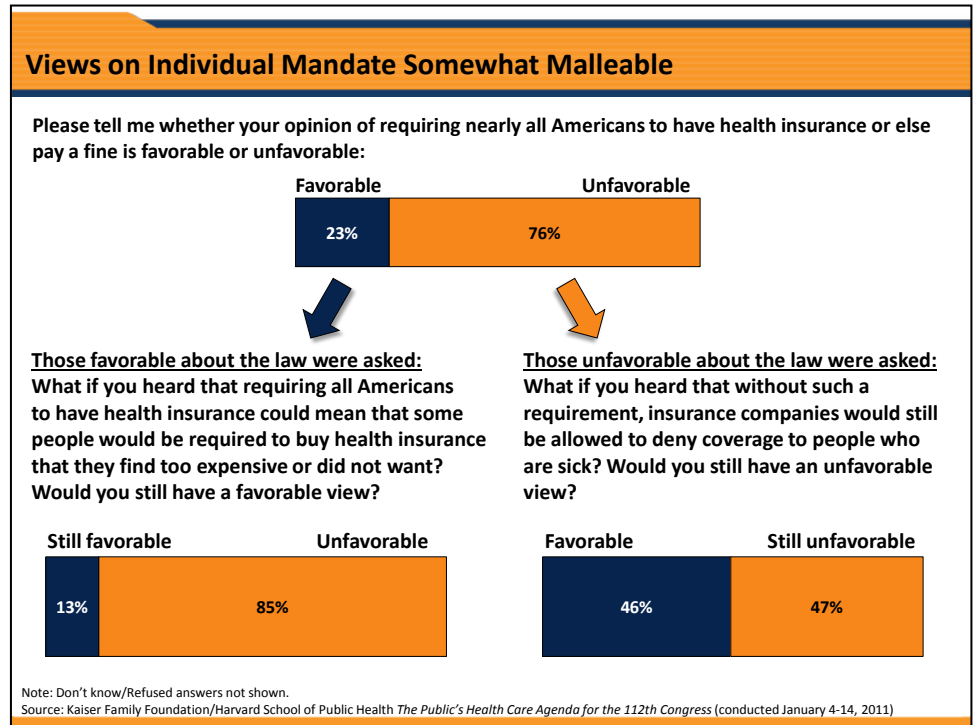
Opinion is more mixed on several provisions, with just over half having a favorable opinion of increases in Medicare premiums for higher income seniors (53 percent favorable, 45 percent unfavorable), and just over half looking unfavorably on a requirement that employers offer health insurance to their workers or pay a penalty (48 percent favorable, 51 percent unfavorable) and on a rule change that excludes over-the-counter drugs from reimbursement through HSAs and FSAs (42 percent favorable, 51 percent unfavorable).

<b>MANY OF REFORM LAW'S SPECIFICS REMAIN POPULAR</b>		
	<b>Percent who hold favorable view of provision</b>	<b>Percent who hold unfavorable view of provision</b>
50% discount on drugs in Medicare doughnut hole	85%	14%
Subsidies for low and moderate income Americans to buy insurance	79	20
CLASS act (voluntary long-term care insurance program)	76	22
Expanding Medicaid	67	32
Medical loss ratio	66	33
Eliminating cost sharing for many preventive services under Medicare	65	30
Bonus to primary care physicians treating Medicare patients	61	37
Reduce payments to Medicare Advantage plans	56	35
Increasing Medicare premiums for some higher-income seniors	53	45
Employer mandate/penalties	48	51
Changing rules for HSAs/FSAs to exclude over-the-counter drugs	42	51
Individual mandate	23	76

*Note: Question wording abbreviated; see Topline document for actual question wording.*

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/113xx/doc11379/AmendReconProp.pdf>.

The individual mandate remains unpopular; 76 percent have an unfavorable view of this provision. However, some malleability in opinion exists. When those who initially oppose the mandate are read the argument that “without such a requirement, insurance companies would still be allowed to deny coverage to people who are sick,” opinion on the mandate becomes more split (46 percent favorable, 47 percent unfavorable). And when those who initially favor the mandate are told that such a mandate “could mean that some people would be required to buy health insurance that they find too expensive or did not want,” opposition rises to 85 percent.



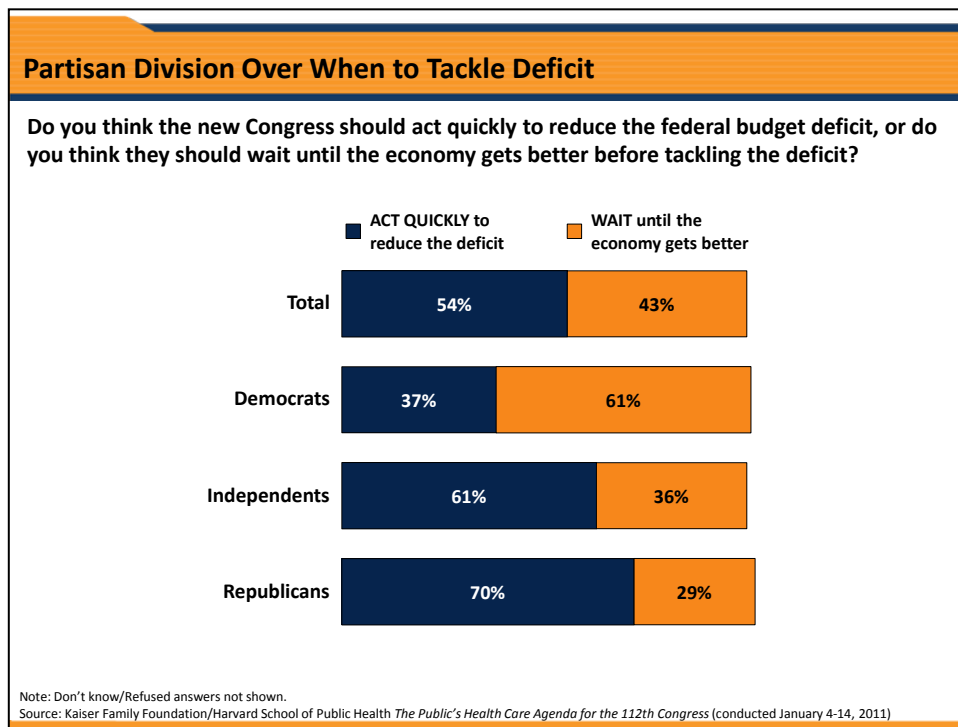
When it comes to the law’s provisions affecting Medicare, over half of seniors say they have a favorable view of the 50 percent discount on drugs provided to those who have reached the doughnut hole, eliminating cost sharing for many preventive services, and providing a bonus to physicians who provide primary care. Support is somewhat lower among seniors for the reduction in funding for Medicare Advantage plans, but still half (50 percent) of seniors view this provision favorably.

SENIORS' AND YOUNGER ADULTS' VIEWS OF HEALTH REFORM PROVISIONS AFFECTING MEDICARE			
<i>Percent with a favorable view of each provision:</i>	Among All	Among ages 65+	Among ages 18-64
50% discount on drugs in Medicare doughnut hole	85%	78%	86%
Increasing Medicare premiums for some higher-income seniors	53	58	53
Eliminating cost sharing for many preventive services under Medicare	65	57	67
Bonus to primary care physicians treating Medicare patients	61	56	62
Reduce payments to Medicare Advantage plans	56	50	57

Note: Question wording abbreviated; see Topline document for actual question wording

## THE BUDGET DEFICIT

Two in three Americans say they are “very concerned” about the federal budget deficit. Republicans (74 percent) and independents (71 percent) are much more likely to say they are “very concerned” than are Democrats (47 percent). And those under age 30 are less likely to express concern than their elders. But Americans are somewhat more divided as to whether now is the time to take on the budget deficit. Currently, a narrow majority of 54 percent think the Congress should take steps quickly to tackle the deficit, while 43 percent think they should wait until the economy improves. There is a partisan divide here: most independents (61 percent) and Republicans (70 percent) want Congress to hit the deficit now, while most Democrats (61 percent) want to wait.



When it comes to *how* to reduce the deficit, most Americans would prefer to see spending reduced (57 percent) rather than relying mainly on tax increases (14 percent). Again, party differences exist. The large majority of Republicans prefer spending cuts (76 percent), and most independents agree (59 percent). However, while a plurality (39 percent) of Democrats would back this approach, Democrats are more likely than independents and Republicans to favor tax increases (22 percent) or taking no action on the deficit now (27 percent).

BEST APPROACH TO REDUCING THE DEFICIT: CUTTING SPENDING MORE POPULAR THAN RAISING TAXES				
Q: Which of the following would you prefer to see the next Congress do about the federal budget deficit?				
	Among All	Among Democrats	Among Independents	Among Republicans
Attempt to reduce the deficit mainly through increasing taxes	14%	22%	12%	8%
Attempt to reduce the deficit mainly by reducing spending on government programs and services	57	39	59	76
Not take any action to reduce the deficit now	19	27	17	11
Combination of tax increases and reduced spending*	5	7	5	3
Don't know/Refused	5	5	6	2

\*Volunteered response

So what areas of spending are Americans willing to cut? Not too many. Of the twelve areas tested in the poll, the majority were only willing to accept “major reductions” in one: foreign aid. In addition, about four in ten would support major reductions in funding for the conflict in Afghanistan and in salaries and benefits for federal government workers. In most areas, majorities favor at least minor reductions but few want to see major cuts; these areas include expanding coverage under the health reform law, food stamps, national defense, unemployment insurance, and aid to farmers.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are three areas where a majority of Americans said they want to see NO reductions, including Social Security, public education and Medicare. And nearly half say the same thing about a fourth category: Medicaid.

<b>WHEN IT COMES TO SPECIFICS, AMERICANS RELUCTANT TO SEE MAJOR CUTS IN MOST AREAS OF SPENDING</b>			
<i>Q: If Congress decides to reduce the deficit by reducing spending on federal programs and services, I'd like to know in which programs you would be willing to see spending reduced. For each program I name, please tell me if you would support major spending reductions, minor spending reductions or no reductions at all as a way to reduce the federal deficit.</i>			
	<b>Percent supporting major reductions</b>	<b>Percent supporting minor reductions</b>	<b>Percent supporting no reductions</b>
Foreign aid	52%	36%	11%
Funding for the conflict in Afghanistan	43	31	23
Salaries and benefits for federal government workers	41	43	15
Expanding insurance coverage under the health reform law	29	40	26
Food stamps	23	41	35
National defense	21	40	38
Unemployment insurance	20	41	37
Aid to farmers	18	44	36
Medicaid	13	39	47
Public education	13	24	63
Medicare	8	35	56
Social Security	8	27	64

Not surprisingly, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to support spending reductions in most areas, with independents somewhere in between. Still, majorities of Republicans say they would not support any reductions in Social Security (59 percent) and public education (53 percent), and nearly half (48 percent) say the same about Medicare. More than half of Republicans want no reductions in national defense, compared with about a third of Democrats and independents.

When it comes to funding for expanding insurance coverage under the health reform law, 44 percent of Republicans say they would support major reductions, while an almost equally large share of Democrats (38 percent) want to see no reductions.

<b>SOME AGREEMENT AMONG PARTISANS ABOUT AREAS TO PROTECT</b>			
<i>Percent who oppose spending reductions in each area:</i>	<b>Among Democrats</b>	<b>Among Independents</b>	<b>Among Republicans</b>
Social Security	69%	63%	59%
Public education	71	62	53
Medicare	65	53	48
Medicaid	58	46	35
National defense	31	34	52
Unemployment insurance	48	36	24
Aid to farmers	35	37	33
Food stamps	45	34	23
Expanding insurance coverage under the health reform law	38	22	16
Funding for the conflict in Afghanistan	16	23	33
Salaries and benefits for federal government workers	22	15	9
Foreign aid	14	9	8



Reluctance to cut Medicare and Medicaid is reflected in the large shares of the public who see these programs as personally important. More than half (55 percent) say Medicare is “very important” to them and their family, with increasing proportions saying so at every age, until it reaches 77 percent among those of Medicare age.

<b>MEDICARE SEEN AS PERSONALLY IMPORTANT</b>					
<i>Percent saying...</i>	<b>Among All</b>	<b>Among ages 18-29</b>	<b>Among ages 30-49</b>	<b>Among ages 50-64</b>	<b>Among ages 65+</b>
Medicare is “very important” to them and their family	55%	34%	52%	64%	77%

Somewhat fewer, but still four in ten, say Medicaid is very important for their families, and another 20 percent say it is somewhat important. The share seeing Medicaid as very important rises to a majority among African Americans, Hispanics, those with lower incomes, and those in fair or poor health.

The idea of an inter-generational war over Social Security and Medicare is not borne out by the survey findings. In fact, majorities across the age spectrum are unwilling to see cuts in either program. This may have something to do with younger people’s concerns about their own ability to rely on these programs in the future. Among those not yet aged 65, the majority (57 percent) say they are “very concerned” that Medicare will not be there when they retire. Even 51 percent of those under age 30 say they are very concerned about this possibility.

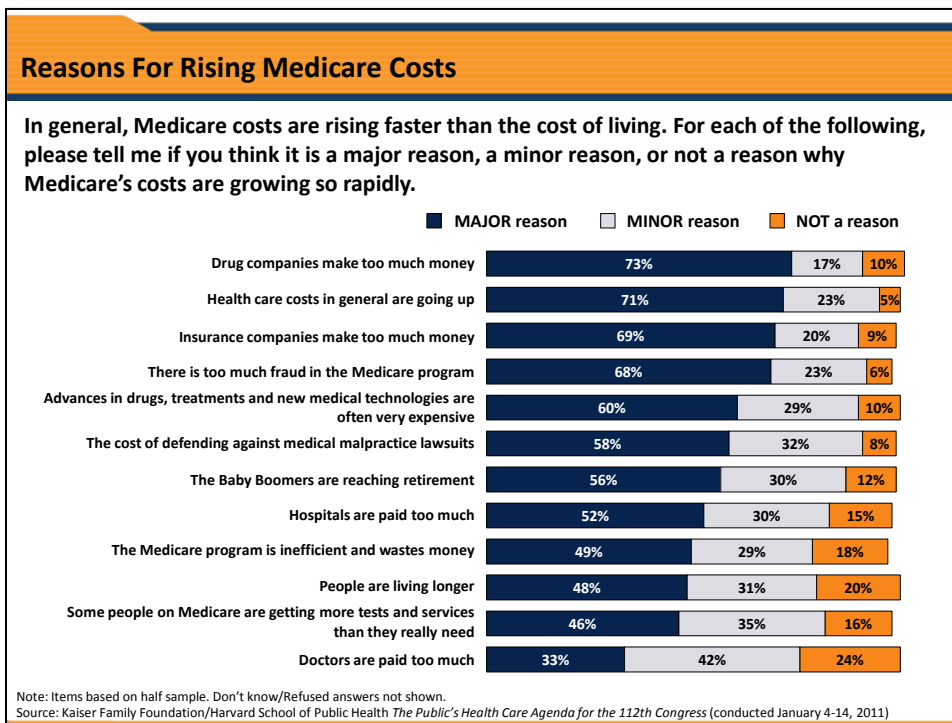
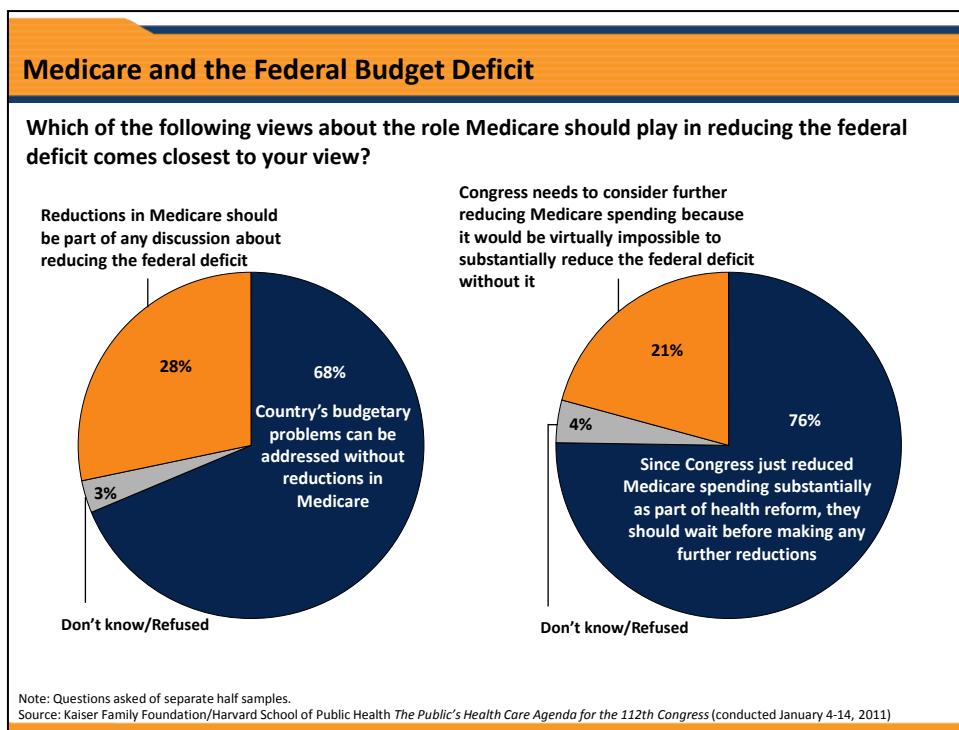
<b>MAJORITIES IN EVERY AGE GROUP OPPOSE CUTTING SPENDING ON MEDICARE AND SOCIAL SECURITY</b>				
<i>Percent supporting spending reductions in each area:</i>	<b>Among ages 18-29</b>	<b>Among ages 30-49</b>	<b>Among ages 50-64</b>	<b>Among ages 65+</b>
<b>Social Security</b>				
Major reductions	9%	10%	7%	6%
Minor reductions	33	28	22	23
No reductions	58	61	70	70
<b>Medicare</b>				
Major reductions	8	9	8	6
Minor reductions	39	35	37	31
No reductions	53	56	55	60

## MEDICARE AND DEFICIT REDUCTION

The findings regarding Americans' desire to protect Medicare are echoed in two questions about Medicare's role in reducing the deficit. In both cases, large majorities say the country's budgetary problems should be addressed without reducing Medicare spending (with the majority being slightly larger when Americans are told that Medicare spending reductions were already made as part of health reform).

Americans show mixed familiarity with the issues underlying the need to restrain the growth in Medicare spending. On the one hand, most say they are aware that health care costs are rising faster than inflation more generally. On the other hand, their primary concern is the rise in the health care costs paid by individuals, with 60 percent saying they are very concerned with people's personal costs, 51 percent with what the nation spends on health care, and 38 percent on increases in government spending on Medicare and Medicaid.

When asked about the reasons Medicare spending is increasing faster than the cost of living, large majorities cite high profits by drug and insurance companies, as well as the general rise in health care costs, and fraud in the Medicare program. But doctors seem to have gotten their message across, as most Americans do not see doctors' fees as a major reason. Hospital charges are in the middle of the list of reasons.



### Methodology

This Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health survey, *The Public's Health Care Agenda for the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress*, was designed and analyzed by public opinion researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation led by Mollyann Brodie, Ph.D., including Claudia Deane, Liz Hamel, Sarah Cho, Bianca DiJulio, and Theresa Boston and by Professor Robert Blendon, Sc.D. and John Benson at the Harvard School of Public Health. The survey was conducted January 4 through January 14, 2011, among a nationally representative random sample of 1,502 adults ages 18 and older. Telephone interviews conducted by landline (1,000) and cell phone (502, including 203 who had no landline telephone) were carried out in English and Spanish by Social Science Research Solutions.

The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on other subgroups, the margin of sampling error may be higher. Note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion poll.

The full question wording, results, charts and a brief on the poll can be viewed online at <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8134.cfm>.



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