

Harris Poll Reveals Health Care is Top Political Concern

Editorial Staff

For the first time in more than four years, Americans believe health care is the most important issue the federal government should address. The figures, the result of a Harris telephone poll conducted October 22-25, show a slow but steady rise in the American public's interest in health care, possibly spurred by the ongoing debate over the so-called "Patients' Bill of Rights" and Medicare drug benefits.

The nationwide survey asked 1,019 adults: "What do you think are the two most important issues for the government to address?" The question was open-ended, meaning that respondents gave spontaneous, unprompted replies without choosing from a list of answers.

Health care tied with education for the top spot in the October poll, with 19% of Americans naming it as one of the two most important issues for the government to address. Crime and violence ranked third with 15%, followed by Social Security (12%) and taxes (11%).

The results marked the first time since February 1995 that health care was listed as the most important political issue, and the first time since April 1996 that it was mentioned by more than 15% of poll respondents. The importance of health care also appears to have been on the rise in the second half of 1999, ranking in the top five issues in each of the last three polls and jumping 10 percentage points between June and October of this year.

Source: Harris Poll#65: Political Trends, November 5, 1999.

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