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**T**he Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health's *Health News Index* is designed to help the news media and people in the health field gain a better understanding of which health stories in the news Americans are following and what they understand about those issues. Every two months since 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 1021 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between December 24, 2000 and January 24, 2001. For comparison purposes, respondents were also asked about other leading issues in the news during the same period.

**Health News Stories Followed by the Public**

Two health news stories caught the public's attention more than others during this period. Forty-two percent said they closely followed news stories about President George W. Bush's executive order on U.S. funding of international family planning groups, and 40% closely followed stories about concerns about the possible spread of Mad Cow Disease.

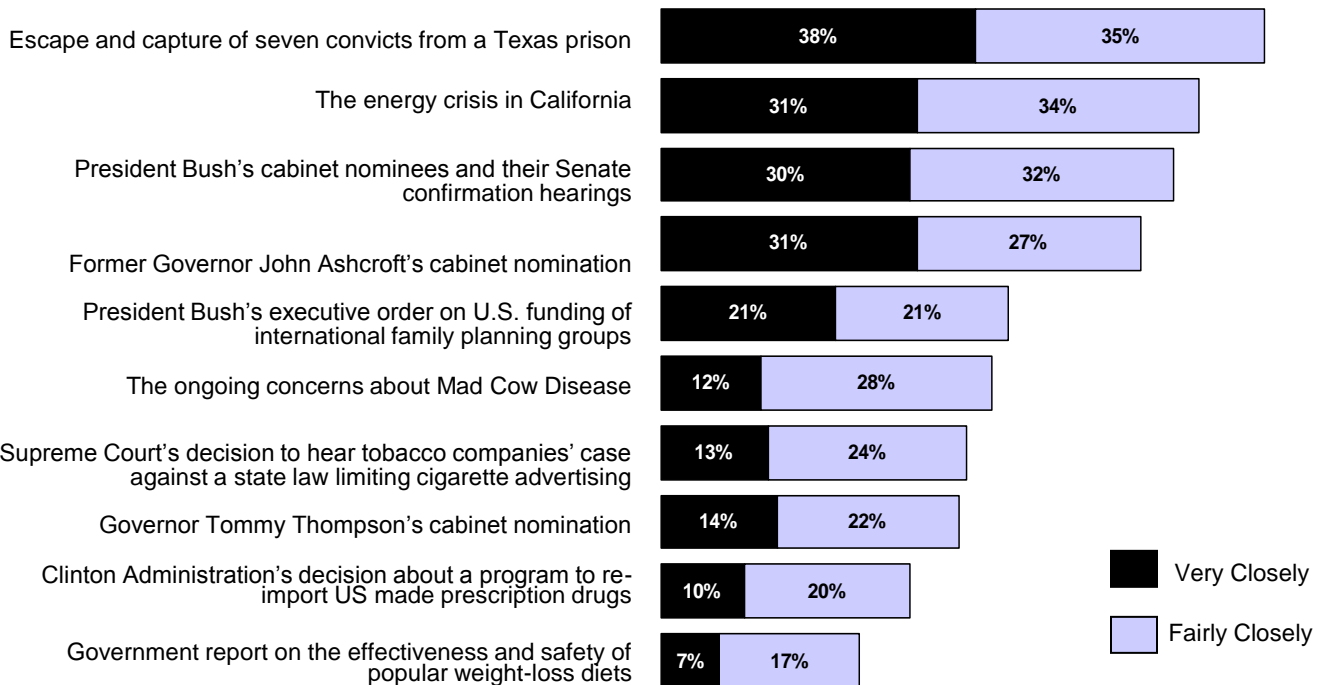
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By comparison, 73% of Americans said they closely followed news of the escape and capture of seven convicts from a Texas prison. About two-thirds (65%) said they closely followed news of the energy crisis in California, and 62% said they closely followed coverage of George W. Bush's cabinet nominees and their Senate confirmation hearings. When asked about particular cabinet nominations, 58% said they followed Bush's nomination of John Ashcroft, and 36% said they followed Bush's nomination of Tommy Thompson.

Among other health issues in the news, thirty-seven percent said they closely followed coverage of the Supreme Court's decision to hear tobacco companies' case against a state law limiting cigarette advertisements. Three in ten (30%) Americans said they followed stories about the Clinton Administration's decision about a program to re-import US made prescription drugs. About one in four (24%) Americans followed stories about a government report on the effectiveness and safety of popular weight loss diets.

**KAISER/HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH HEALTH NEWS INDEX**

**How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from December 24, 2000 to January 24, 2001**

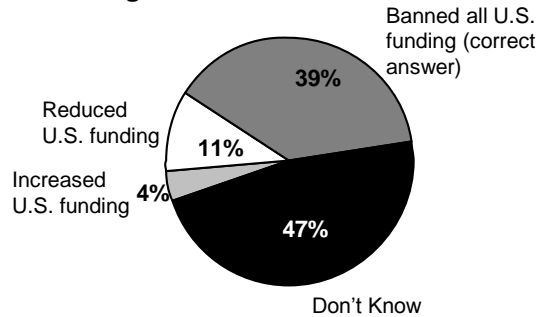


# WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

## Funding for International Family Planning Groups

About four in ten Americans (42%) said they closely followed coverage of George W. Bush's executive order on U.S. funding of international family planning groups. About four in ten (39%) correctly said that President Bush's order banned all U.S. funding for international groups that provide abortions, abortion counseling, or that lobby for abortion rights. Fifteen percent answered incorrectly and said that President Bush increased funding for these groups (4%) or decreased funding for these groups (11%). Forty-seven percent said they did not know.

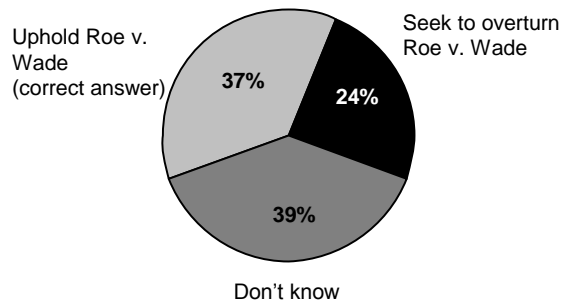
What did President Bush's executive order on U.S. funding of international family planning groups that provide abortion or abortion counseling do?



## Cabinet Nominations

About six in ten Americans (62%) said they closely followed coverage of President Bush's cabinet nominees and their Senate confirmation hearings. When asked about particular nominations, 58% said they followed Former Governor John Ashcroft's nomination, and 36% said they followed Governor Tommy Thompson's nomination. When asked to identify which Cabinet positions Thompson and Ashcroft were nominated to fill, 47% responded correctly that Ashcroft had been nominated for Attorney General, and 22% responded correctly that Thompson had been nominated for Secretary of Health and Human Services. When asked more specifically about the Senate confirmation hearings to confirm Ashcroft for Attorney General, 37% of respondents knew that during these hearings, Ashcroft said that as Attorney General he would uphold Roe v. Wade. Twenty-four percent mistakenly thought he said that as Attorney General, he would seek to overturn Roe v. Wade. Thirty-nine percent said they did not know.

During his Senate confirmation hearings, John Ashcroft said that as Attorney General, he would...



## Popular Weight-loss Diets

About a quarter (24%) of Americans reported that they closely followed news stories about a government report on the effectiveness and safety of popular weight-loss diets. About one in five (18%) correctly identified the moderate-fat, high-carbohydrate diet such as the Food Guide Pyramid as the type of diet that the USDA report said is the best nutritionally, the most likely to keep the weight off, as well as lower cholesterol and blood pressure levels. About a quarter (24%) answered incorrectly and said that the report said a high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet such as the Atkins diet was best (14%) or that a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet such as the Pritikin diet is best (10%). Over half (58%) said they did not know which type of diet the report had judged as the safest and most effective.

Which type of weight-loss diet did the USDA report judge the best nutritionally and the most effective?

