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To: Trust for America's Health

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RE: 2006 BUDGET POLL

Tackling issues affecting health and safety is a priority for Americans in the coming year. Voters express strong concerns about a variety of health problems and risks, from chronic illnesses like cancer and heart disease to biological or chemical terrorism and pandemic flu. There is a deep sense that government is unprepared to handle many of these threats, and voters believe that government should invest more into funding researching causes and preventing these diseases.

The following are findings from a survey conducted January 19-22, 2006 among 1000 adults, including 814 registered voters¹. The results presented focus primarily on the registered voter universe.

- **Nearly 7-in-10 voters (69 percent) believe government should be spending more on researching causes and preventing disease.** This includes nearly half of voters (45 percent) who indicate that government should be spending “much more” on research and prevention, after hearing information on the breakdown of current health spending. Increasing government’s investment in this area cuts across political, racial, and geographic lines, gaining strong majorities with most groups. African Americans (85 percent more spending, 67 percent much more), women (74 percent more spending, 48 percent much more), and those with an income of less than \$50,000 per year (75 percent more spending, 50 percent much more) are more likely, however, to support greater funding.

¹ This survey of 1000 adults is subject to a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent. The margin of error for the 814 registered voters is +/- 3.5 percent.



Support for Increased Spending on Researching Causes and Preventing Diseases <i>(Percent responding)</i>	
	% More Spending
Total	69
Men	63
Women	74
White	68
African American	85
Democrat	78
Independent	65
Republicans	60
Northeast	75
Central	62
South	67
West	74

- **Chronic diseases cause the greatest concerns for voters, with worldwide flu epidemic breaking through as an emerging threat.** Voters express concern about the health problems to which they are most likely to have a personal connection. Cancer continues to be the top concern for voters, with 26 percent citing it as their top health concern. This is followed by two other chronic illnesses, heart disease (15 percent), and obesity (14 percent). Another 10 percent of voters cite a worldwide flu pandemic, like the bird flu, as the biggest concern, a significant increase from last year.² Other health risks, such as terrorism, infectious diseases, and food contamination, threats that are farther removed from people's everyday life, are less prominent.

These results follow similar trends when the health problems are measured individually. Voters also express great concern about each of the chronic illnesses and worldwide flu, with overwhelming majorities saying that they are concerned about cancer (82 percent most/great deal/some) and heart disease (78 percent). Larger scale risks like terrorism, infectious diseases, and food safety fall to a second tier, but also raise concerns for nearly half of voters.

² In a 2005 Public Opinion Strategies poll done for TFAH, three percent of registered voters chose "a *nationwide* flu epidemic" as their top health concern."



Concerns about Health Risks <i>(Percent responding, concerns most/great deal/some)</i>	
Cancer	82
Heart disease	78
A worldwide flu epidemic	57
Obesity	53
Chemical terrorism	52
Shortage of vaccines	51
Food contamination	51
Biological terrorist attacks	50
Infectious diseases, like AIDS	49
Asthma	45

- **Voters express higher concern about issues they believe threaten them personally. Most vulnerable groups express higher concern about broad scale threats.** Some of the trends include:
 - *Race.* While white voters are as likely as African Americans to be concerned about chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease, African American audiences are more likely to express fear about biological terrorism (60 percent versus 50 percent for the rest of the population), chemical terrorism (60 percent African American versus 52 percent) and flu epidemics (71 percent African American versus 51 percent). African Americans also indicate greater concern about infectious diseases like AIDS, with 69 percent saying it concerns them (compared with just 49 percent). African Americans also cite this issue as their top overall concern, the *only* group not to rank cancer as the top concern.
 - *Age.* Younger voters (under 40) are less concerned about the various health risks and problems than their older counterparts. Some risks stand out for specific groups. Seniors are most likely to worry about a flu epidemic (64 percent). Problems like heart disease and obesity garner the highest levels of concern among older voters. Obesity is a high concern (58 percent) for voters between the ages of 40 and 64, and voters over the age of 40 are most likely to say that heart disease is a top concern for them.



- *Moms.* Women with children under the age of 18, who are often most exposed to health problems involving their kids, are most likely to say that they are concerned about asthma (53 percent). They also worry more than others about all health risks.
- **Voters think government is unprepared to handle potential threats, including an outbreak of pandemic flu, natural disasters, or terrorist attacks on our food supply.** The news and events of the past year have clearly had an impact on Americans' perceptions of government's readiness to deal with major health emergencies. Fifty-five percent of voters say that government is unready to face a worldwide outbreak of flu, 54 percent say that we are unprepared for another natural disaster like Katrina, and 51 percent indicate that we are not ready to handle an attack on the U.S. food supply. Even in situations where voters are most likely to say that government is prepared, just a plurality or slight majority tilt to the government being prepared. This includes the threat of a nationwide flu outbreak (54 percent prepared) biological or chemical terrorist attack (50 percent prepared), and the obesity epidemic (48 percent prepared).

Perceptions of Preparedness on Potential Health Emergencies <i>(Percent Responding)</i>				
	% Very Prepared	% Total Prepared	% Very Unprepared	% Total Unprepared
A worldwide outbreak of the flu ³	7	42	27	55
A natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina	12	45	30	54
A terrorist attack on our food supply	10	43	27	51
A biological or chemical terrorist attack	11	50	25	47
The obesity epidemic	12	48	20	47
A nationwide outbreak of the flu ⁴	9	54	20	43

³ Asked of a half sample, including 504 interviews with adults (407 among registered voters)

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Importantly, there is a great deal more intensity among voters who believe that government is unprepared to handle potential health crises. Between 20 to 30 percent of voters say that government is “very unprepared” to address potential health emergencies. In contrast, just 7-12 percent of voters say that the health system is “very prepared” on any of the topics tested.

- **Unlike with health concerns, divisions emerge on whether the government is prepared to handle potential health threats and disasters.** The question of preparedness, which is linked to government performance and competence, produces greater differences among political and racial groups than concern about health risks overall. A few key trends emerge:
 - *A huge racial gap emerges on broad scale issues.* In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, African Americans indicate strong skepticism in the government’s ability to protect Americans from large scale crises like a natural disaster or pandemic flu. This results in huge differences between views of African American voters and the rest of the population.

Perceptions of Preparedness on Potential Health Emergencies by Race <i>(Percent Responding, Total Unprepared)</i>		
	Percent Unprepared Entire Population	Percent Unprepared African Americans
Worldwide flu outbreak	55	73
Natural disaster like Katrina	54	71

- *Women see government as less prepared than men.* In general, women express greater apprehension than men about the government’s readiness to deal with health threats. More than 6-in-10 young women say that the government is unprepared for a worldwide flu outbreak (69 percent), natural disaster (62 percent), or attack on our food supply (60 percent). Women with a college degree express the greatest fear about government’s ability to handle a worldwide flu outbreak, with 75 percent saying that government is unprepared to handle such a crisis.