

AMERICANS' HEALTH AND EDUCATION PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW CONGRESS IN 2019

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SUMMARY

At the beginning of the new Congress, a poll by POLITICO and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health shows the public's top health and education priorities for the 2019 Congress. This poll, the second part of a multiple-poll series on Americans' priorities for the new Congress, focuses exclusively on priorities in the areas of health and education, which were shown in the earlier poll to be extremely important overall priorities for the new Congress.

In contrast to results from the first poll in the series, which highlighted many of the major partisan differences in Americans' health priorities, the new poll finds that adherents of both political parties have three policy areas in common among their top five extremely important health priorities for the 2019 Congress. These are: lowering prescription drug prices; making sure insurance companies still have to provide health insurance for pre-existing conditions; and making sure Medicare benefits are not cut back.

Another important finding is that a majority of the public is not aware that the previous Congress repealed the individual mandate, the part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) that required nearly all Americans to have health insurance or else pay a fine. This means that the answer to the question of whether or not the individual mandate is essential for the future viability of the ACA is unclear at this point.

When it comes to education, the poll finds that adherents of both political parties choose two policy areas as their top extremely important education priorities for the new Congress. These are finding ways to lessen student debt and increasing spending on K-12 public education.

“These findings, in both health and education, suggest that in a few areas there will be opportunities for bipartisan cooperation and legislation,” said Robert J. Blendon, co-director of the survey and the Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

PART I: AMERICANS' HEALTH PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW CONGRESS

A new poll by POLITICO and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health asked Americans about their health priorities for the 2019 Congress. Respondents were given a list of 13 health policy areas identified in the media and in the recent congressional campaigns as potential priority action items for the new Congress. Because Congress can only take action on a few of them at a time, people were asked whether or not each of the areas should be an “extremely important” priority.

In contrast to results from the first poll in the series, which highlighted many of the major partisan differences in Americans’ health priorities, the new poll finds that adherents of both political parties have three policy areas in common among their top five extremely important health priorities for the new Congress. As shown in Table 1, these are: lowering prescription drug prices; making sure insurance companies still have to provide health insurance for pre-existing conditions; and making sure Medicare benefits are not cut back.

This suggests an opportunity for bipartisan cooperation in enacting legislation in these three areas. As to lowering prescription drug prices, it is important to note that this was one of the public’s top overall priorities for the new Congress, as shown in the first poll in this series.

Table 1. Americans’ Top Health Priorities for the New Congress, by Party Identification

Rank	Total		Democrats		Republicans	
	Priority	% saying “extremely important”		% saying “extremely important”	Priority	% saying “extremely important”
1	Lowering prescription drug prices	92	Lowering prescription drug prices	94	Lowering prescription drug prices	89
2	Making sure insurance companies still have to provide health insurance for pre-existing conditions	91	Making sure insurance companies still have to provide health insurance for pre-existing conditions	94	Lowering the overall cost of health care	85
3	Making sure Medicare benefits are not cut back	88	Making sure Medicare benefits are not cut back	93	Making sure insurance companies still have to provide health insurance for pre-existing conditions	82
4	Lowering the overall cost of health care	88	Making sure people don’t lose their health insurance coverage under the ACA	92	Increasing spending on the veterans’ health care system	82
5	Increasing spending on research to find cures for diseases	85	Increasing spending on research to find cures for diseases	91	Making sure Medicare benefits are not cut back	78

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans’ Health and Education Priorities for the New Congress in 2019, December 11 – 16, 2018. Base: U.S. adults.

For the public as a whole, the other two top extremely important health priorities are lowering the overall cost of health care and increasing spending on research to find cures for diseases. But

Democrats and Republicans disagree on the other two top issues. For Democrats, the other top health priorities are making sure people do not lose their health insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and increasing spending on research to find cures for diseases. For Republicans, the other top priorities are lowering the overall cost of health care and increasing spending on the veterans’ health care system.

Of note, the poll finds 42% of Democrats saying that repealing and replacing the ACA is extremely important. However, in reality, the poll shows that Democrats generally want to enlarge and not reduce the extent of coverage in the ACA. For instance, more than eight in ten Democrats believe that making sure people do not lose their health insurance coverage under the ACA (92%) and enacting a Medicare-for-all plan (84%) should be extremely important priorities.

The poll also examines people’s awareness of critical issues in health being discussed by some members of the new Congress. The most important finding, shown in Table 2, is that a majority of the public is not aware that the previous Congress repealed the individual mandate, the part of the ACA that required nearly all Americans to have health insurance or else pay a fine.

Table 2. Public Awareness of Whether the Last Congress Eliminated the Requirement That Nearly All Americans Have Health Insurance or Else Pay a Fine, by Party Identification (in percent)

	Eliminated this requirement	Did not eliminate this requirement	Don’t know/Refused
Total	36	43	21
Democrats	31	49	20
Republicans	41	40	19
Independents	38	42	20

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans’ Health and Education Priorities for the New Congress in 2019, December 11 – 16, 2018. Base: U.S. adults.

This means that the answer to the question of whether or not the individual mandate is essential for the future viability of the ACA is unclear at this point. At the time of the recent enrollment period, a majority of Americans believed that would be paying a fine if they did not purchase health insurance, or were unsure if the individual mandate was still in effect.

“These findings suggest that the jury is still out on whether or not this change will impact enrollment in the ACA in the near-term future,” said Professor Blendon.

Looking ahead to the coming debate about health care, the poll asked about two proposals that some members of the new Congress have suggested for future action. As shown in Table 3, in both cases – allowing people voluntarily to buy into Medicare even if they are under age 65 or to buy into another type of government insurance program – a majority of public has not heard or read about their being discussed by anyone in Congress.

Table 3. Public Awareness of Two Health Care Proposals (in percent)

	Have heard or read about this	Have NOT heard or read about this
The federal government allowing people under 65 to buy health insurance through the Medicare program.	32	67
The federal government establishing a new government-sponsored health insurance program, often called a public option. People who currently have private insurance would be offered a choice of private health insurance plans or enrolling in this new government insurance program.	31	68

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans' Health and Education Priorities for the New Congress in 2019, December 11 – 16, 2018. Base: U.S. adults.

As shown in Tables 4 and 5, when asked their views about these two proposals, a majority of Americans favor both of them. These results suggest that in future debates, if Americans had the option of voluntarily buying into Medicare or another type of government insurance program, there might be considerable public support.

Table 4. Americans' Views about Allowing People Under Age 65 to Voluntarily Buy into Medicare, by Party Identification (in percent)

	Favor	Oppose	Don't know/ Refused
Total	71	22	7
Democrats	83	14	3
Republicans	60	32	8
Independents	69	24	7

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans' Health and Education Priorities for the New Congress in 2019, December 11 – 16, 2018. Base: U.S. adults.

Table 5. Americans' Views about Allowing People to Voluntarily Buy into a Public Option, by Party Identification (in percent)

	Favor	Oppose	Don't know/ Refused
Total	65	29	6
Democrats	70	23	7
Republicans	51	44	5
Independents	71	24	5

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans' Health and Education Priorities for the New Congress in 2019, December 11 – 16, 2018. Base: U.S. adults.

PART II: AMERICANS' EDUCATION PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW CONGRESS

The new poll by POLITICO / Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health poll also looked at Americans' priorities for congressional action on the issue of education. Because at the national level education has not received as much attention as health has, the choices for action discussed in the media have been fewer.

Respondents were given a list of six education policy areas identified in the media and in the recent congressional campaigns as potential priority action items for the new Congress. Because Congress can only take action on a few of them at a time, people were asked whether or not each of the areas should be an "extremely important" priority.

When it comes to education, the poll finds that adherents of both political parties choose two policy areas as their top extremely important education priorities for the new Congress. As shown in Table 6, these are finding ways to lessen student debt and increasing spending on K-12 public education.

Table 6. Americans' Top Education Priorities for the New Congress, by Party Identification

Rank	Total		Democrats		Republicans	
	Priority	% saying "extremely important"	Priority	% saying "extremely important"	Priority	% saying "extremely important"
1	Finding ways to lessen student debt	79	Increasing spending on K-12 public education	88	Increasing spending on K-12 public education	64
2	Increasing spending on K-12 public education	76	Finding ways to lessen student debt	87	Finding ways to lessen student debt	61
3	Increasing federal spending for local community colleges	66	Increasing federal spending for local community colleges	76	Enacting legislation to make it easier for students to go to charter schools or private schools	59
4	Increasing federal spending on school buildings	66	Increasing federal spending on school buildings	73	Increasing federal spending on school buildings	55
5	Enacting legislation to make it easier for students to go to charter schools or private schools	55	Increasing federal regulation of for-profit colleges and for-profit technical institutes	59	Increasing federal spending for local community colleges	49

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Americans' Health and Education Priorities for the New Congress in 2019, December 11 – 16, 2018. Base: U.S. adults.

However, the third priority for Democrats is increasing federal spending for local community colleges, while for Republicans it is enacting legislation to make it easier for students to go to charter schools or private schools. This suggests continuing partisan division on the future of U.S. education policy.

It is important to note that the percentage citing the top priorities for congressional action is consistently lower for education priorities than for health priorities in both polls. This suggests that at the national level education policy issues are less salient as a priority for the public right now than health policy issues.

METHODOLOGY

The results are based on polling conducted by *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Representatives of the two organizations worked closely to develop the survey questionnaires and analyze the results of the polls. *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health paid for the surveys and related expenses.

The project team was led by Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Joanne Kenen, Executive Editor, Health Care at *Politico/Politico Pro*. Harvard research team also included John M. Benson and Justin M. Sayde.

Interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,013 randomly selected adults, ages 18 and older, via telephone (including cell phones and landlines) by SSRS of Glen Mills, Pennsylvania. The interviewing period was December 11 – 16, 2018. The data were weighted to reflect the demographics of the national adult population as described by the U.S. Census.

When interpreting these findings, one should recognize that all surveys are subject to sampling error. Results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole U.S. adult population had been interviewed. The margin of error for the full sample is ± 3.7 percentage points. For questions asked of half-samples, the margin of error is ± 5.2 percentage points.

Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases and for variations in probability of selection within and across households, sample data are weighted by household size, cell phone/landline use and demographics (sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, and region) to reflect the true population. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.

Politico/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Poll

**AMERICANS’ HEALTH AND EDUCATION PRIORITIES
FOR THE NEW CONGRESS IN 2019**

This survey was conducted for *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health via telephone by SSRS, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted via telephone (cell phone and landline) **December 11 – 16, 2018**, among a nationally representative sample of **1,013 U.S. adults**. The margin of error for total respondents is ± 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For questions asked of half-samples, the margin of error is ± 5.2 percentage points. More information about SSRS can be obtained by visiting www.ssrs.com.

HEALTH

(Asked of half -sample A; n=557)

POLQ1. The new Congress could take action on health care. Here is a list of some things they could do. Because they can only take action on a few of them at a time, we are only asking whether or not you think each of the following should be an EXTREMELY IMPORTANT priority. How about (INSERT ITEM)? Should that be an EXTREMELY IMPORTANT priority or not?

- a. Making sure people don’t lose their health insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don’t know/ Refused
Total	79	19	2
Dems	92	5	3
Reps	56	40	4
Inds	81	18	1

- b. Lowering prescription drug prices

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don’t know/ Refused
Total	92	8	*
Dems	94	6	-
Reps	89	10	1
Inds	90	9	1

- c. Providing health insurance coverage for everyone through a taxpayer-funded national plan like Medicare for all

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	68	30	2
Dems	84	14	2
Reps	39	60	1
Inds	70	28	2

- d. Increasing federal spending for opioid and drug abuse treatment

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	67	32	1
Dems	74	25	1
Reps	57	42	1
Inds	66	33	1

- e. Limiting the number of low-income people covered by Medicaid

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	46	52	2
Dems	40	58	2
Reps	52	47	1
Inds	48	48	4

- f. Increasing the number of low-income people covered by Medicaid

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	70	28	2
Dems	81	14	5
Reps	44	54	2
Inds	71	28	1

- g. Repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	53	43	4
Dems	42	54	4
Reps	72	28	-
Inds	52	43	5

- h. Increasing spending on research to find cures for diseases

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	85	14	1
Dems	91	8	1
Reps	74	23	3
Inds	85	14	1

- i. Making sure insurance companies still have to provide health insurance for pre-existing conditions

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	91	8	1
Dems	94	4	2
Reps	82	17	1
Inds	94	6	-

- j. Lowering the overall cost of health care

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	88	11	1
Dems	89	11	*
Reps	85	15	-
Inds	88	10	2

- k. Making sure Medicare benefits are not cut back

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	88	10	2
Dems	93	7	-
Reps	78	22	*
Inds	90	7	3

- l. Increasing spending on the veterans' health care system

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	84	14	2
Dems	82	16	2
Reps	82	18	-
Inds	89	10	1

- m. Fixing problems in the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	76	22	2
Dems	84	14	2
Reps	60	38	2
Inds	79	19	2

**Summary (% saying each of the following should be an “extremely important” priority)
Based on half-sample A; n=557**

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Lowering prescription drug prices	92	94	89	90
Making sure insurance companies still have to provide health insurance for pre-existing conditions	91	94	82	94
Making sure Medicare benefits are not cut back	88	93	78	90
Lowering the overall cost of health care	88	89	85	88
Increasing spending on research to find cures for diseases	85	91	74	85
Increasing spending on the veterans’ health care system	84	82	82	89
Making sure people don’t lose their health insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare	79	92	56	81
Fixing problems in the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare	76	84	60	79
Increasing the number of low-income people covered by Medicaid	70	83	44	71
Providing health insurance coverage for everyone through a taxpayer-funded national plan like Medicare for all	68	84	39	70
Increasing federal spending for opioid and drug abuse treatment	67	74	57	66
Repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare	53	42	72	52
Limiting the number of low-income people covered by Medicaid	46	40	52	48

(Asked of half -sample B; n=456)

POLQ2. The Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare, required nearly all Americans to have health insurance or else pay a fine. To the best of your knowledge, did the last Congress eliminate this requirement or mandate, or not?

	Eliminated this requirement	Did not eliminate this requirement	Don't know/Refused
Total	36	43	21
Dems	31	49	20
Reps	41	40	19
Inds	38	42	20

(Asked of half -sample B respondents who said last Congress eliminated the requirement or mandate in which the Affordable Care Act required nearly all Americans to have health insurance or else pay a fine; n=177)

POLQ3. Do you think this change has made things better or worse for health care in the U.S., or hasn't it made much difference?

	Better	Worse	Hasn't made much difference	Don't know/Refused
Total	25	36	39	*
Dems	22	46	32	-
Reps	51	19	30	-
Inds	11	39	49	1

POLQ2/POLQ3 Combo Table
Based on half -sample B; n=456

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Last Congress eliminated the requirement or mandate in which the Affordable Care Act required nearly all Americans to have health insurance or else pay a fine	36	31	41	38
Has made things better for health care in the U.S.	9	7	21	4
Has made things worse for health care in the U.S.	13	14	8	15
Hasn't made much difference	14	10	12	19
Last Congress did not eliminate the requirement or mandate in which the Affordable Care Act required nearly all Americans to have health insurance or else pay a fine	43	49	40	42
Don't know/Refused	21	20	19	20

(Asked of half -sample B; n=456)

POLQ4. Some members of Congress have proposed that the federal government establish a new government-sponsored health insurance program, often called a public option. People who currently have private insurance would be offered a choice of private health insurance plans or enrolling in this new government insurance program. Have you heard or read about such a proposal?

	Yes, have heard or read about this	No, have NOT heard or read about this	Don't know/ Refused
Total	31	68	1
Dems	33	66	1
Reps	33	67	-
Inds	31	67	2

(Asked of half -sample B; n=456)

POLQ5. From what you know, do you favor or oppose the federal government offering a public option government health insurance program?

	Favor	Oppose	Don't know/ Refused
Total	65	29	6
Dems	70	23	7
Reps	51	44	5
Inds	71	24	5

(Asked of half -sample B; n=456)

POLQ6. As you may know, people become eligible for health insurance through Medicare when they turn 65. Some members of Congress have proposed that the federal government allow people **under** 65 to buy health insurance through the Medicare program. Have you heard or read about such a proposal?

	Yes, have heard or read about this	No, have NOT heard or read about this	Don't know/ Refused
Total	32	67	1
Dems	31	68	1
Reps	37	63	-
Inds	31	69	-

(Asked of half -sample B; n=456)

POLQ7. From what you know, do you favor or oppose allowing people under 65 to buy health insurance through Medicare?

	Favor	Oppose	Don't know/ Refused
Total	71	22	7
Dems	83	14	3
Reps	60	32	8
Inds	69	24	7

EDUCATION

(Asked of half -sample B; n=456)

POLQ8. The new Congress could take action on education. Here is a list of some things they could do. Because they can only take action on a few of them at a time, we are only asking whether or not you think each of the following should be an EXTREMELY IMPORTANT priority. How about (INSERT ITEM)? Should that be an EXTREMELY IMPORTANT priority or not?

- a. Increasing federal spending on school buildings

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	66	33	1
Dems	73	27	-
Reps	55	43	2
Inds	68	32	*

- b. Increasing spending on K-12 public education

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	76	22	2
Dems	88	10	2
Reps	64	33	3
Inds	75	23	2

- c. Finding ways to lessen student debt

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	79	19	2
Dems	87	12	1
Reps	61	38	1
Inds	84	14	2

d. Enacting legislation to make it easier for students to go to charter schools or private schools

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	55	44	1
Dems	50	49	1
Reps	59	41	-
Inds	57	41	2

e. Increasing federal regulation of for-profit colleges and for-profit technical institutes

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	48	49	3
Dems	59	36	5
Reps	39	58	3
Inds	45	52	3

f. Increasing federal spending for local community colleges

	Yes, should be an extremely important priority	No, should NOT be an extremely important priority	Don't know/ Refused
Total	66	32	2
Dems	76	24	*
Reps	49	50	1
Inds	68	29	3

**Summary (% saying each of the following should be an “extremely important” priority)
Based on half -sample B; n=456**

	Total	Dems	Reps	Inds
Finding ways to lessen student debt	79	87	61	84
Increasing spending on K-12 public education	76	88	64	75
Increasing federal spending for local community colleges	66	76	49	68
Increasing federal spending on school buildings	66	73	55	68
Enacting legislation to make it easier for students to go to charter schools or private schools	55	50	59	57
Increasing federal regulation of for-profit colleges and for-profit technical institutes	48	59	39	45