

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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**VOTERS INITIALLY SUPPORTING
HEALTH CARE COVERAGE
REQUIREMENTS REFERENDUM.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

One of the more controversial measures on the November election ballot will be a referendum that seeks to repeal the Health Insurance Act of 2003 (SB2) passed by the legislature and Governor Gray Davis last year.

The law requires companies with 200 or more employees to buy health insurance for workers and their families by 2006. Firms with 50 to 199 employees would need to buy coverage for their employees starting in 2007.

In its most recent statewide survey completed late last month, *The Field Poll* measured initial voter awareness and preferences toward the ballot measure, called the Health Care Coverage Requirements referendum.

The results indicate that half (50%) of those likely to vote in the upcoming November election say they are currently inclined to vote YES to approve the new law, 28% say they will vote NO to repeal it, while 22% are undecided.

Voter awareness of the referendum is at a relatively low level, with 23% of likely voters saying they had knowledge of it prior to being read its main provisions.

Significant subgroup differences

Initial vote support and opposition to the referendum appears to have two distinct dimensions to it. The first is a political dimension, with preferences tied to a voter's party affiliation, political ideology, and Presidential vote preferences. The second is a more personal dimension and relates to the degree of concern that voters have that they or someone close to them could go without health insurance in the future.

On the political dimension, Democrats, liberals and supporters of John Kerry for President are supporting the referendum by the widest margins, with each group favoring it greater than three to one. In addition, non-partisans, political moderates and those not supporting either of the major party candidates for President are roughly two to one in favor of the referendum. On the other hand, pluralities of Republicans, conservatives and supporters of George W. Bush for President are opposed, but by narrower four to three margins.

Voter concerns about potentially going without health insurance in the future are also tied to support or opposition to the referendum. For example, there is greater than two to one support for the referendum among voters who are not currently covered by health insurance or say they are very concerned that they or someone close to them will be without health care coverage in the future. This is significant since these groups constitute 11% and 44% of the likely electorate, respectively. By contrast, insured voters who say they are not concerned about the possibility of going without coverage in the future divide evenly on the measure.

The poll also finds that while pluralities of both men and women initially favor the referendum, women voters are more supportive than men. Similarly, while voters in each major racial and ethnic subgroup support the referendum, white non-Hispanic voters are somewhat less supportive than Latinos and those in other racial/ethnic subgroups. Union members are also initially more supportive of the referendum than those not affiliated with a labor union.

Table 1
Initial voter preferences regarding the Health Care Coverage Requirements referendum
(among likely voters)

	<u>Would vote YES</u>	<u>Would vote NO</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Statewide	50%	28	22
<u>Party</u>			
(.43) Democrats	61%	17	22
(.37) Republicans	36%	41	23
(.20) Non-partisans/others	52%	27	21
<u>Ideology</u>			
(.31) Conservative	33%	45	22
(.45) Middle-of-the-road	56%	21	23
(.24) Liberal	62%	18	20
<u>Gender</u>			
(.48) Men	47%	35	18
(.52) Women	53%	22	25
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
(.69) White non-Hispanic	45%	30	25
(.17) Latino	62%	22	16
(.14) Others*	58%	22	20
<u>Union affiliation</u>			
(.27) Yes, anyone in household	60%	24	16
(.73) No	47%	29	24
<u>Health insurance status</u>			
(.11) Not insured*	60%	29	11
(.89) Insured	49%	28	23
<u>Concern about not having health insurance in future (among those insured)</u>			
(.44) Very concerned	57%	18	25
(.20) Somewhat concerned	44%	38	18
(.25) Not too/not at all concerned	39%	38	23
<u>Presidential preference</u>			
(.51) Kerry voter	60%	17	23
(.39) Bush voter	36%	42	22
(.10) Other/undecided*	55%	26	19

* Small sample size.

The campaign ahead

The California State Chamber of Commerce and other business groups were successful in gaining the more than 600,000 signatures needed to place this referendum on the ballot and have formed an umbrella organization, Californians Against Government Run Healthcare, to overturn SB2. The campaign has attacked the law as a job killer that will boost their costs, force higher taxes and would result in more government involvement in the state's health care system.

Supporters of SB2 include the California Medical Association and the state's largest labor unions. They defend the new law by saying it will increase the number of workers with health insurance coverage and levels the playing field between those companies who currently offer health insurance to their employees and those who don't.

The election is still five months away and campaigning on the measure is likely to become extremely heated, with millions of dollars spent by both sides. Given the high salience of the issue to voters, it is also likely that candidates running for other elections this year, including those in the state senate and Assembly, as well as U.S. Senate and President, will be taking a stand on the issue and this could influence voter choices. In addition, the public position that Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger takes on the referendum – particularly if he campaigns actively – could have a decided impact on the outcome.

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Information About the Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a cross-section sampling of 647 registered voters who are likely to vote in the November statewide election. Interviews were conducted by telephone in English and Spanish May 18-24, 2004. Up to five attempts were made to reach a randomly selected voter at each number dialed. After the completion of interviewing, the larger registered voter sample was weighted to Field Poll estimates of the state's total registered voter population.

According to statistical theory, results in this report have a sampling error of +/- 4.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. There are other possible sources of error in any survey in addition to sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sequencing or through omissions or errors in sampling, interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

Questions Asked

Have you seen, read or heard anything about a referendum that will appear on the statewide election ballot having to do with health care coverage for employees?

It's called the Health Care Coverage Requirements Referendum. A 'YES' vote approves and a 'NO' vote rejects legislation requiring health care coverage for employees working for large and medium-size employers. Fiscal impact: significant expenditures and costs for state and local employee health coverage offset by fees and revenues mainly from employers for purchasing health care. If the vote on this referendum were being held today, would you vote YES to approve or NO to reject this referendum?