

AMERICAN VIEWPOINT

Health Care and the 2008 Presidential Election

Prepared for the

Alliance for Health Reform

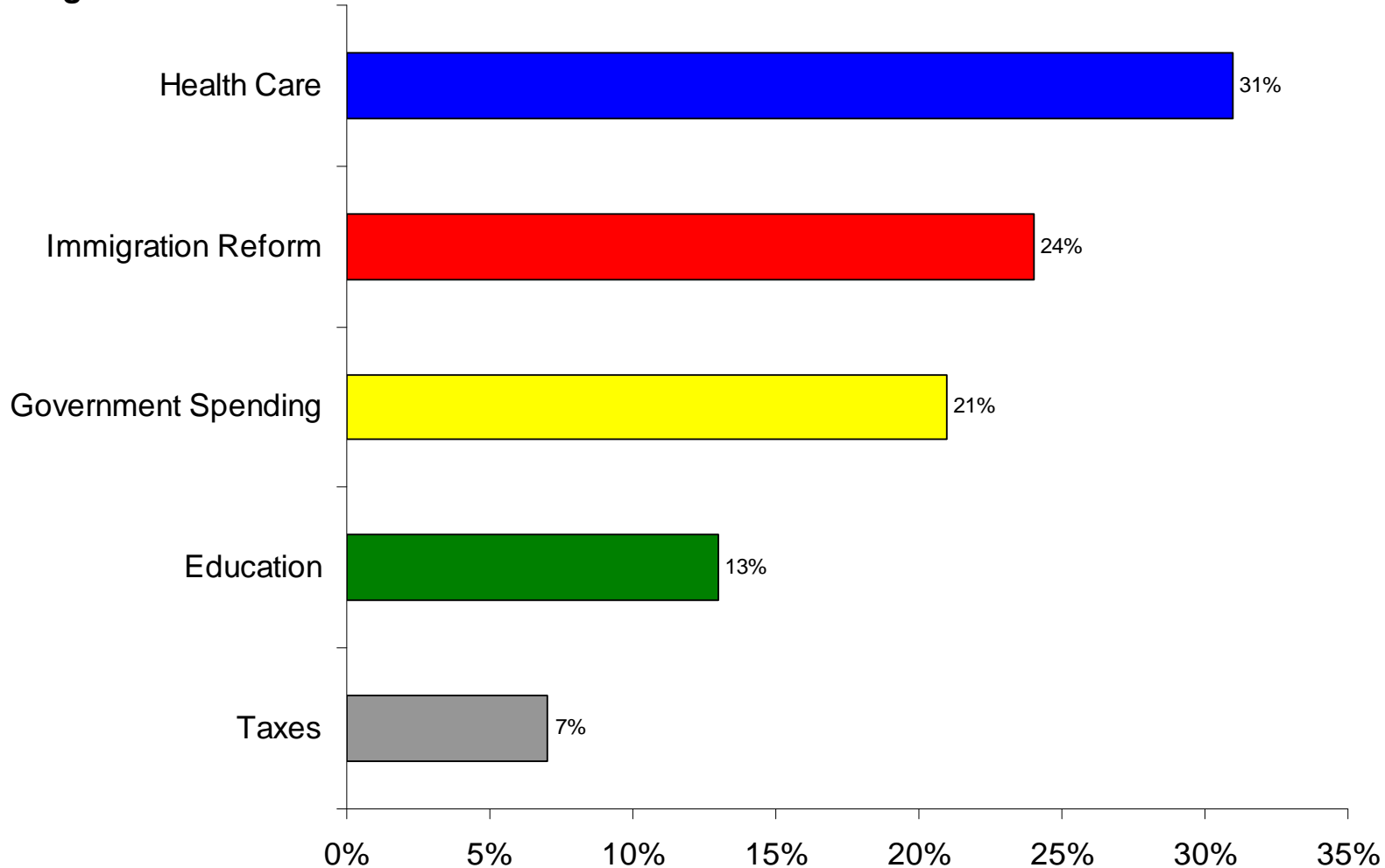
By

**Gary A. Ferguson,
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July 2007

Voters say that health care is a top domestic issue for the President and Congress to address.

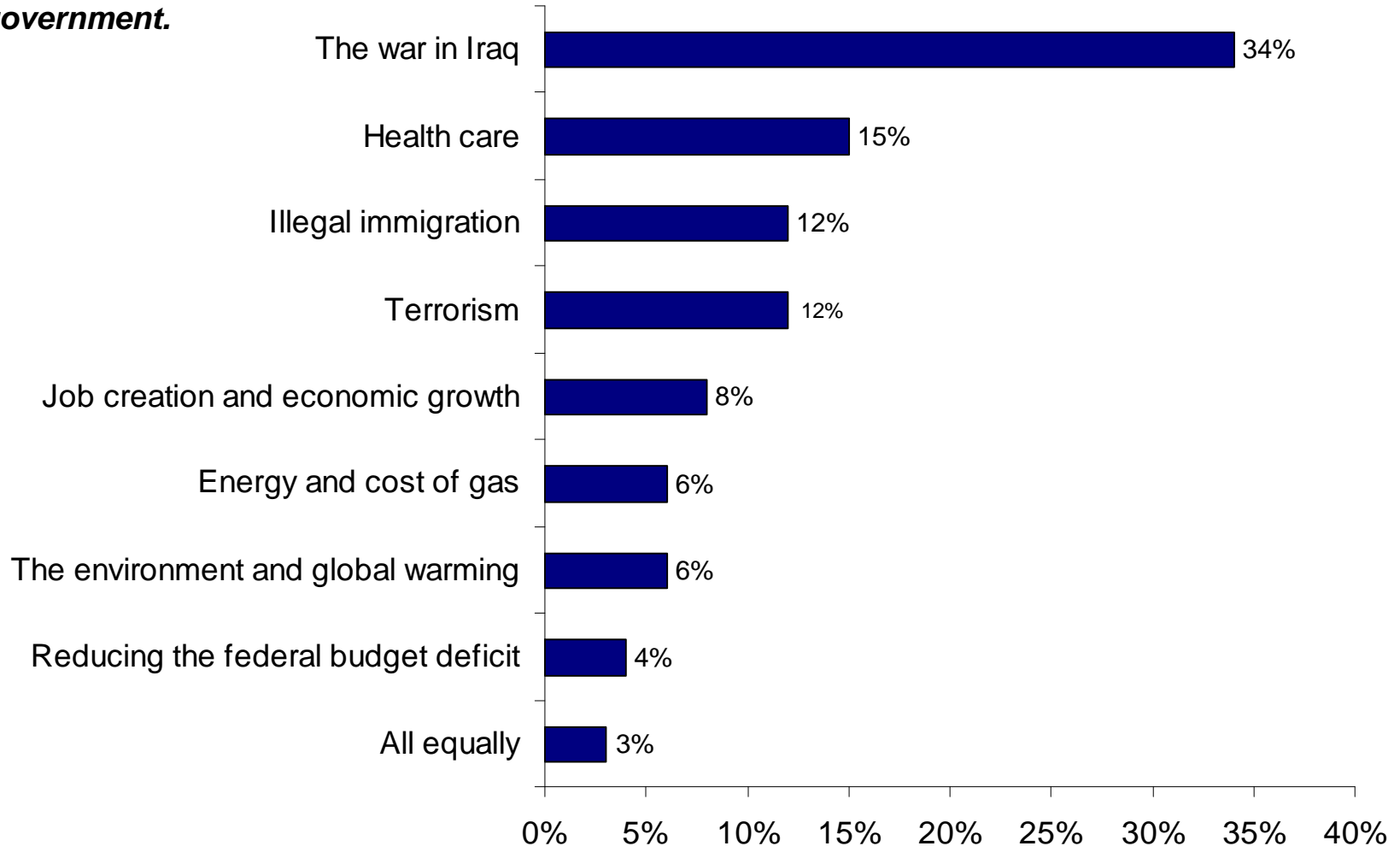
Which of the following domestic issues do you think is most important for the President and Congress to address?



FAH Uninsured Survey, American Viewpoint, Feb. 5-7, 2007,
N=1200 Registered Voters

The war in Iraq, however, takes precedence over other issues at this time.

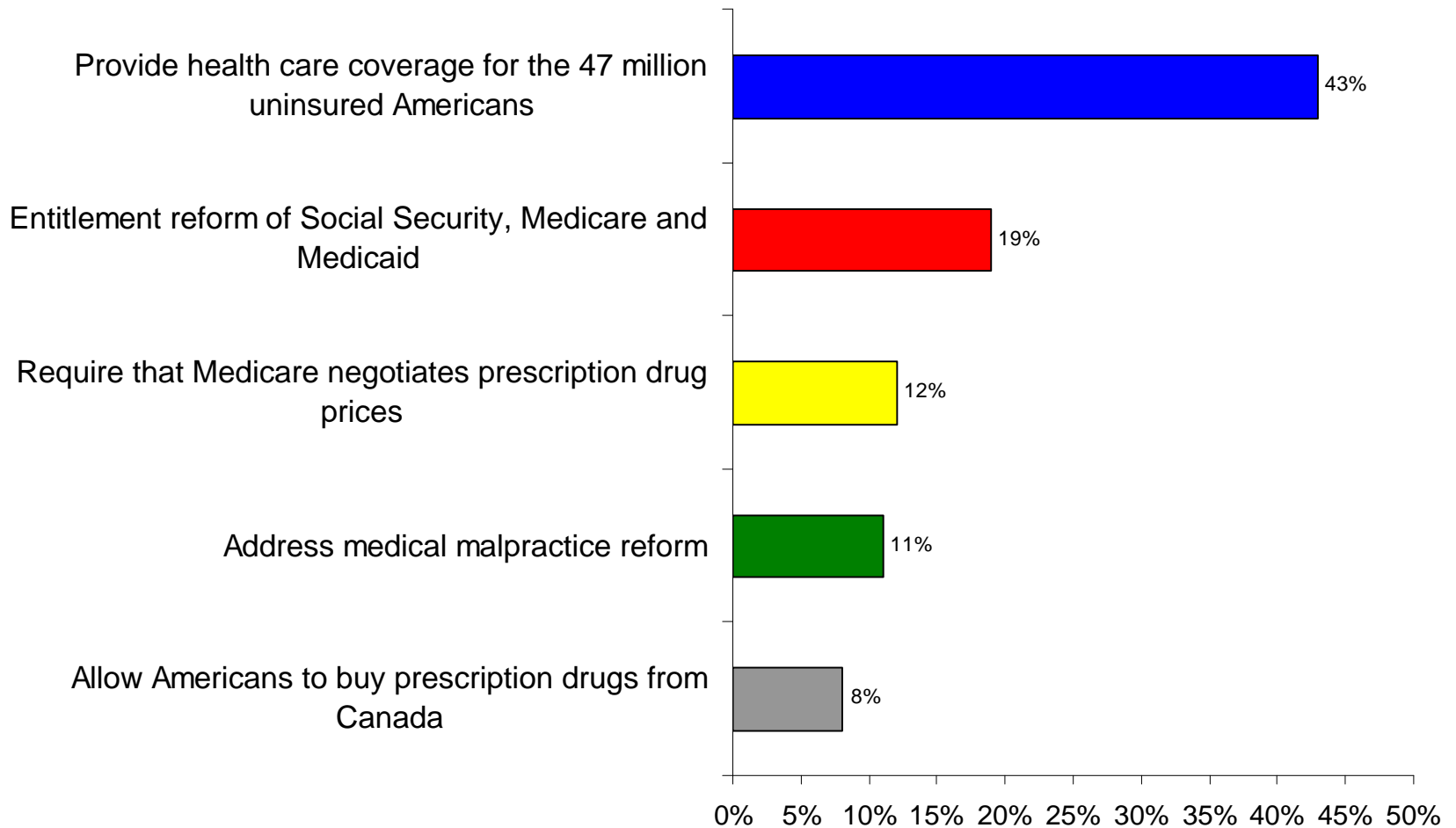
Let me list some issues that have been proposed for the federal government to address. Please tell me which one of these items you think should be the top priority for the federal government.



NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, Hart/Newhouse
June 8-11, 2007, N=1008 Adults

Addressing the problem of the uninsured is a major concern for voters.

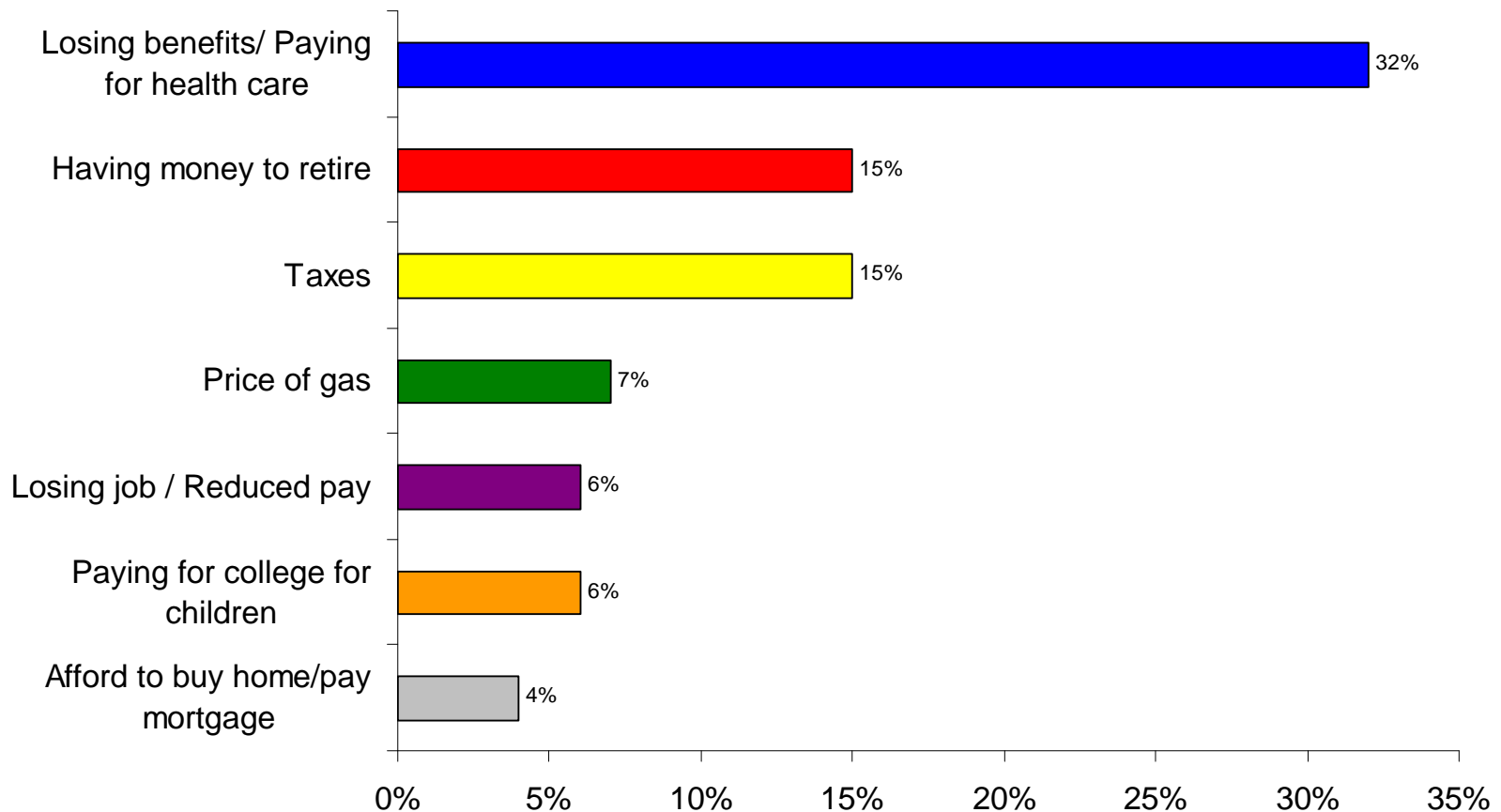
I would now like to read you several issues related to health care and have you tell me which you think is most important for President Bush and Congress to address.



FAH Uninsured Survey, American Viewpoint, Feb. 5-7, 2007, N=1200 Registered Voters

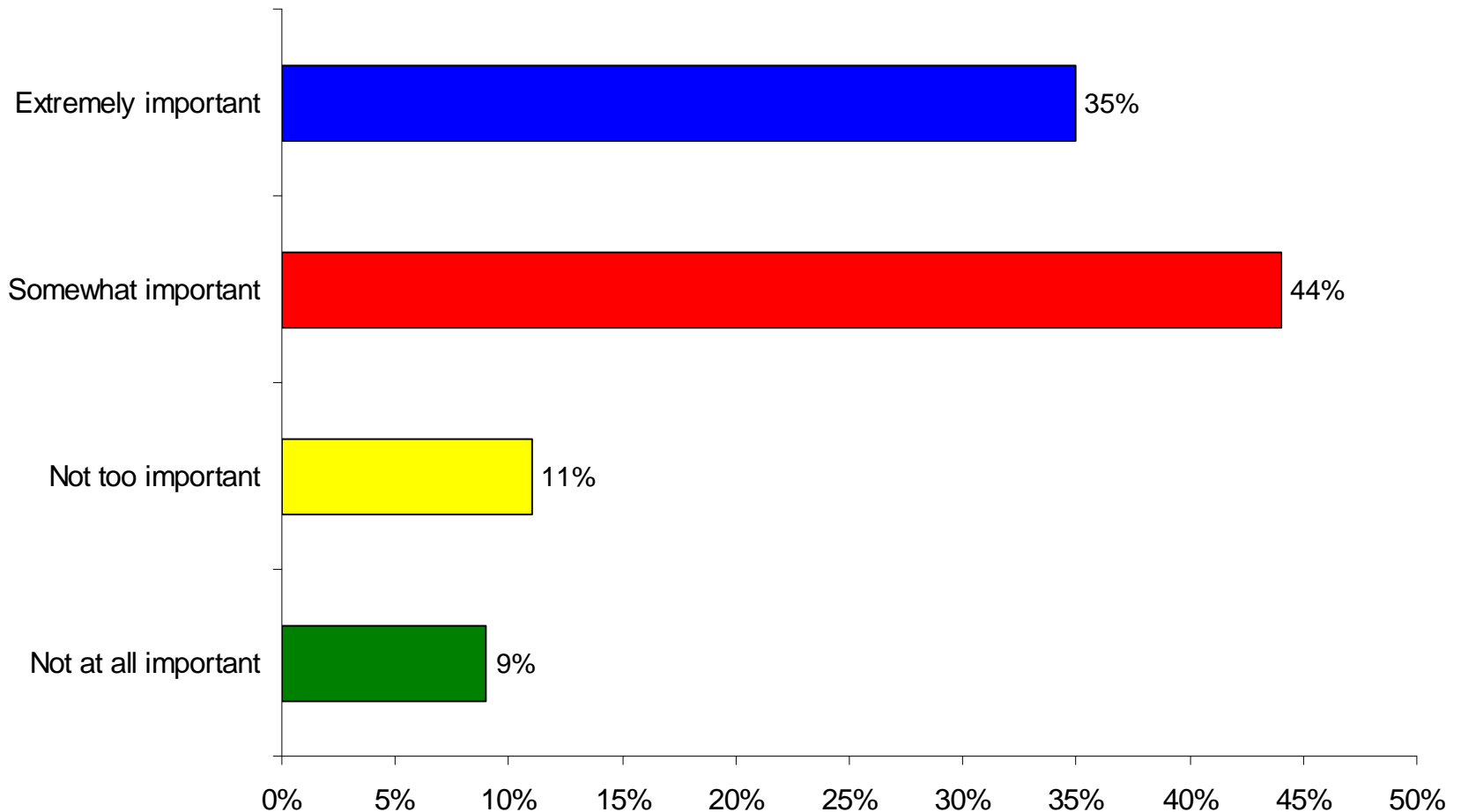
Health care is an economic security issue and more voters are concerned about losing health benefits/paying for health care expenses than are concerned about having enough money to retire or losing their job/pay.

Now I would like to read you a list of financial concerns that some people have said worry or concern them. Please listen as I read the list and tell me which one of these worries or concerns you the most.



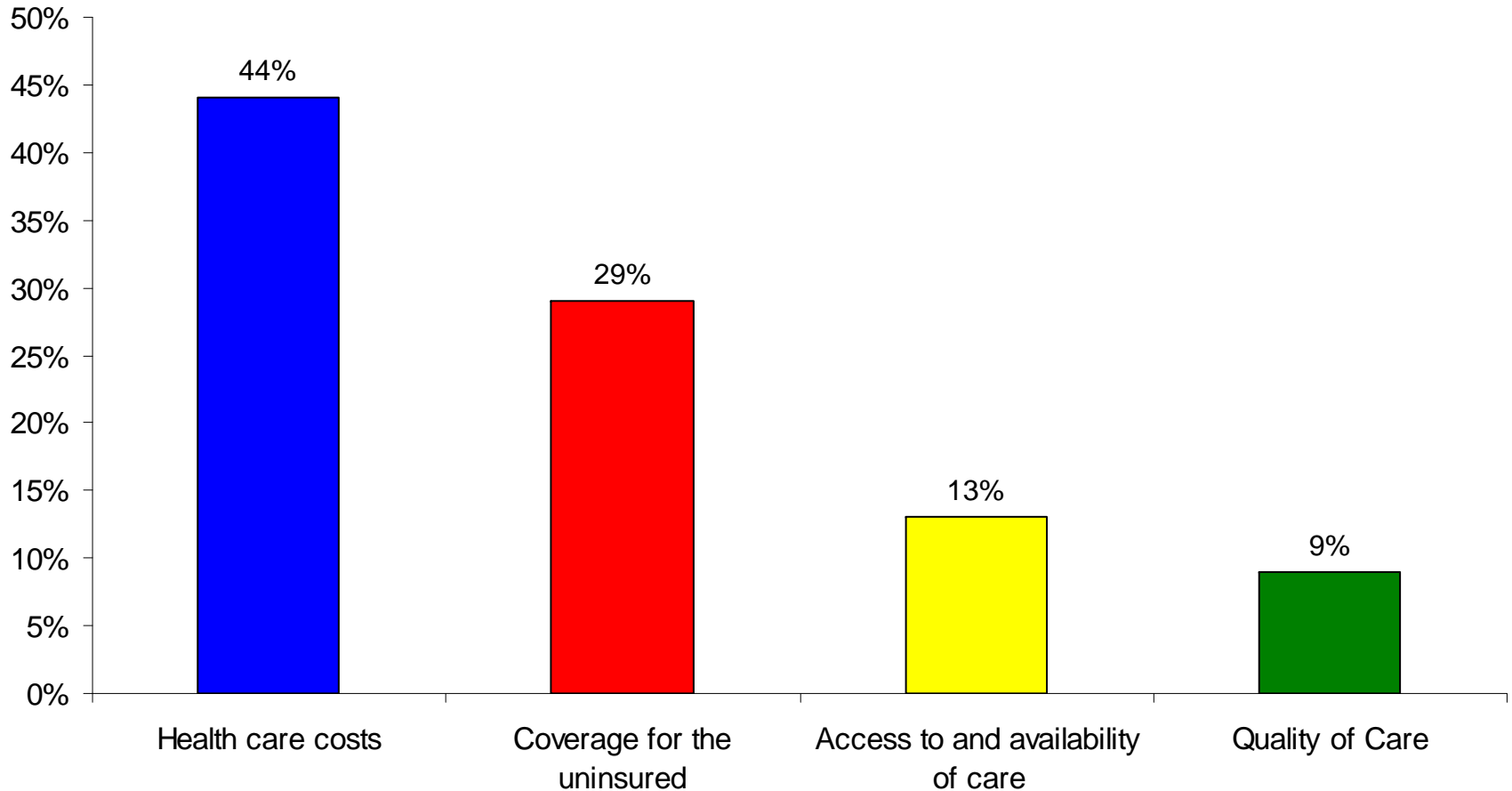
Voters say that a presidential candidate's position on the uninsured will be an important voting determinant in 2008.

How important will a Presidential candidate's position on addressing the issue of health care coverage for the uninsured be in deciding your vote in 2008?



Voters say that cost is the aspect of the health care system that needs the most change.

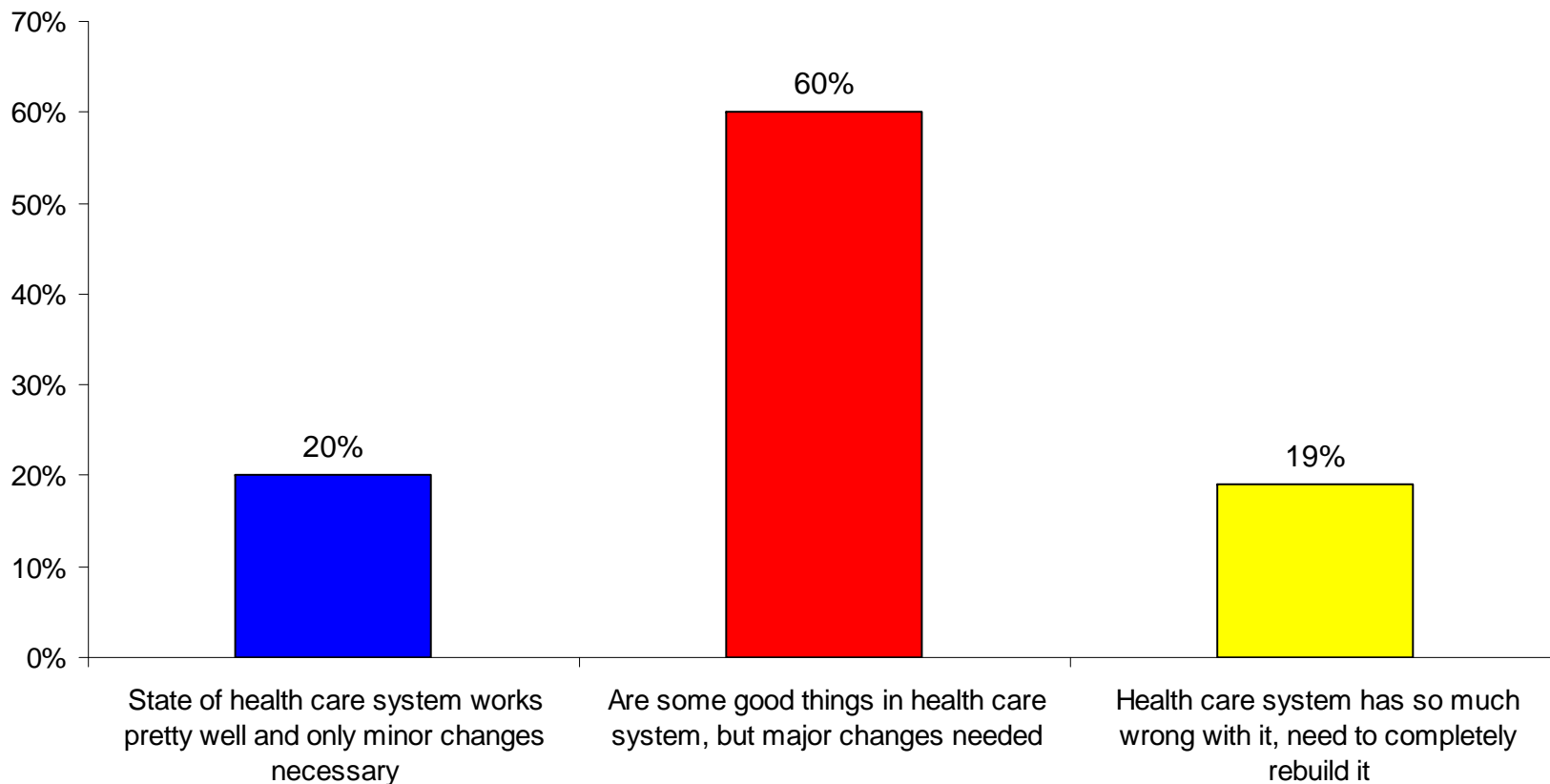
What aspect of the health care system needs the MOST change?



*FAH Uninsured Survey, American Viewpoint, Feb. 5-7, 2007,
N=1200 Registered Voters*

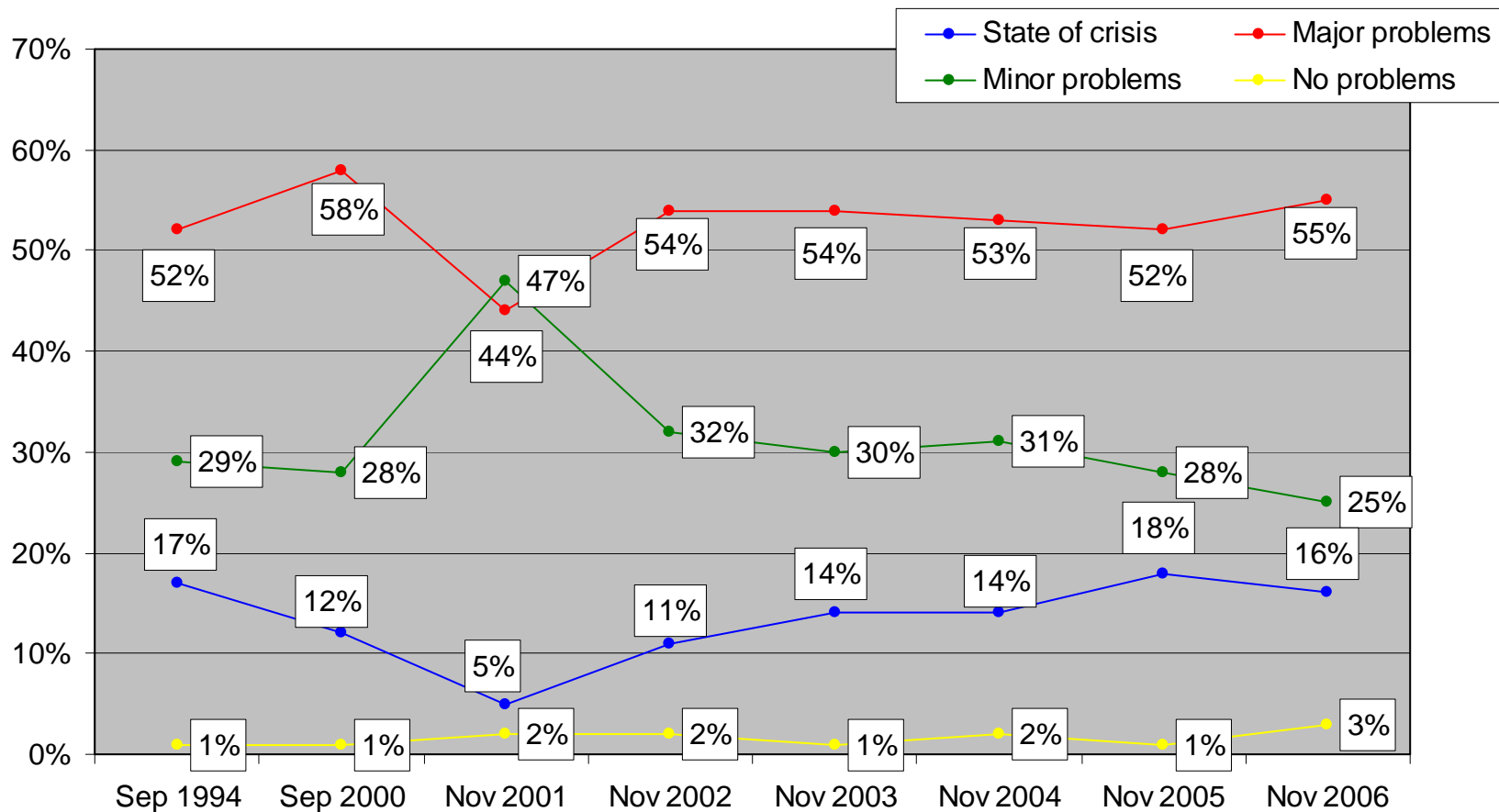
Most voters say that although there are some good things about our health care system, major changes are needed.

Which of the following three statements comes closest to expressing your view of the health care system in the United States?




Relatively few say the U.S. health care system is in a state of crisis.

Which of these statements do you think best describes the U.S. health care system today – it is in a state of crisis, it has major problems, it has minor problems or it does not have any problems?



Although voters give a low rating to the health system overall and say that major changes are needed, they rate their own health coverage higher than Medicare or universal coverage.

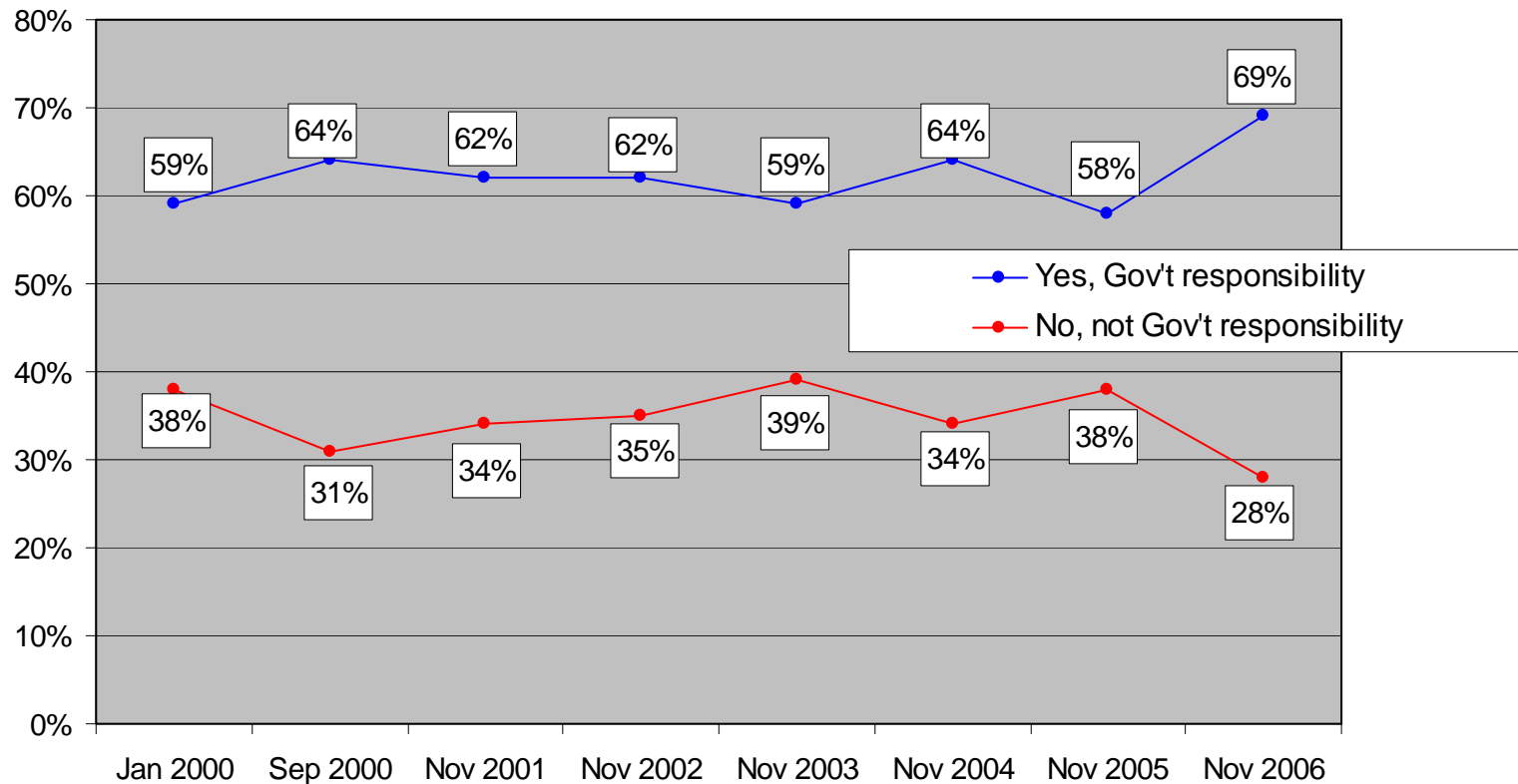
I'd like you to rate your feelings toward some programs using a zero to one hundred scale – with 100 meaning you have a very warm feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold.



Ranked by Total Mean Score		2007
	Your health care coverage	66
	Medicare program	56
	Universal health care coverage	51
	Our current health care system	41

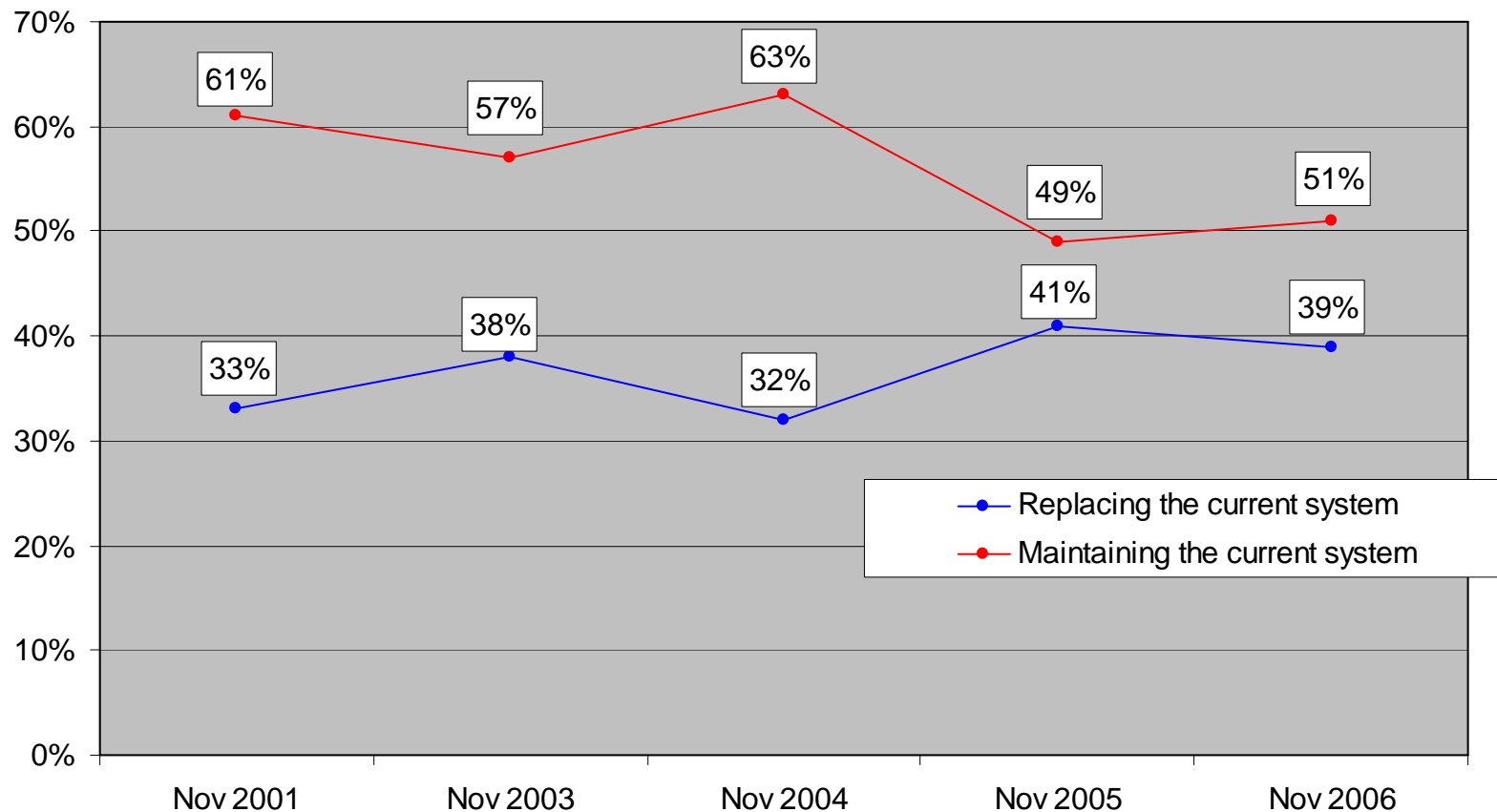
The public thinks the federal government has the responsibility to make sure that all Americans have health care coverage.

Do you think it is the responsibility of the federal government to make sure all Americans have health care coverage, or is that not the responsibility of the federal government?



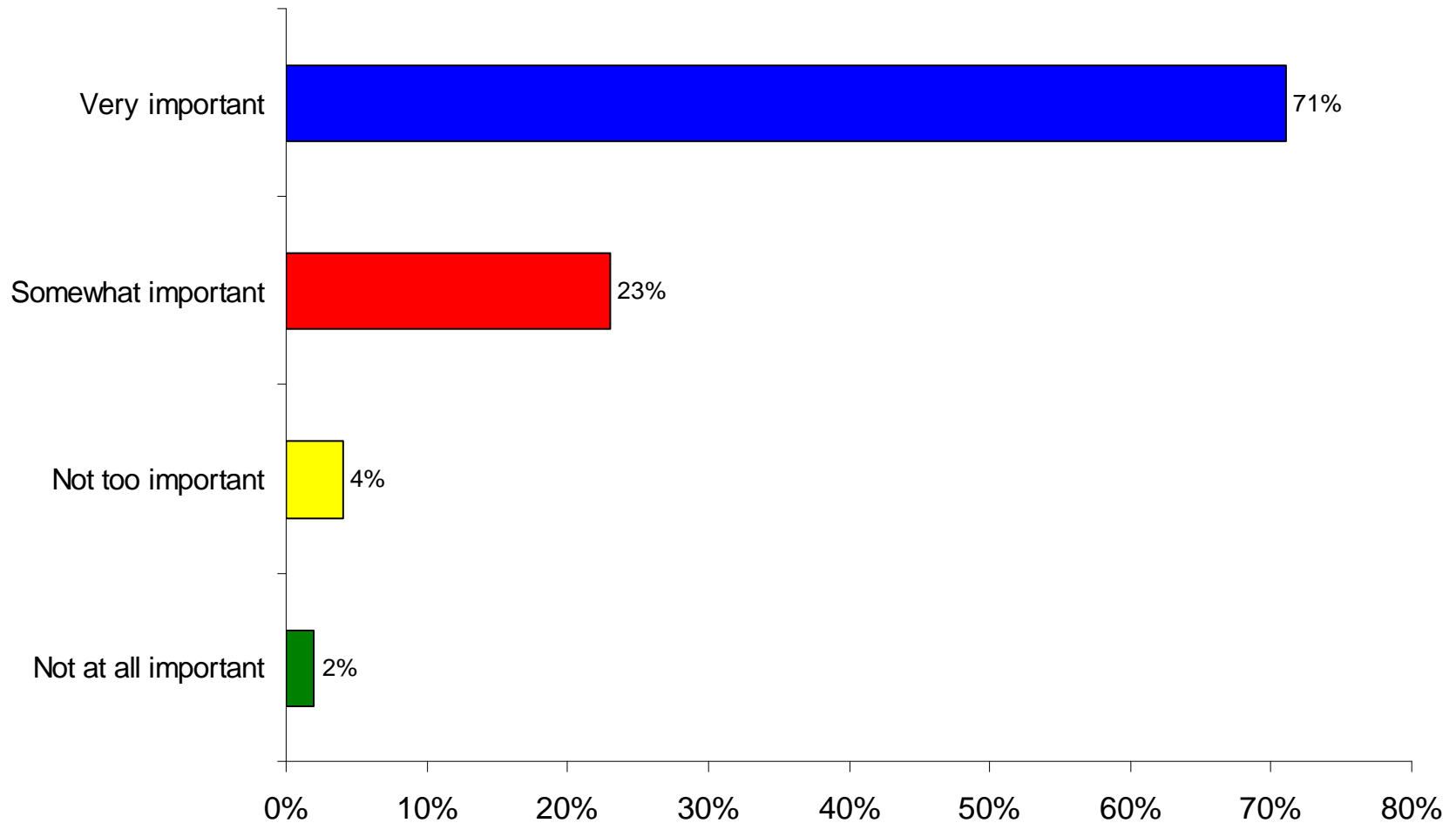
Americans remain skeptical about a government-run health system and most would prefer to maintain the current system based mostly on private health insurance.

Which of the following approaches for providing health care in the United States would you prefer – replacing the current health care system with a new government run health care system, or maintaining the current system based mostly on private health insurance?



Most Americans say that the issue of health care will be very important in making their 2008 voting decision.

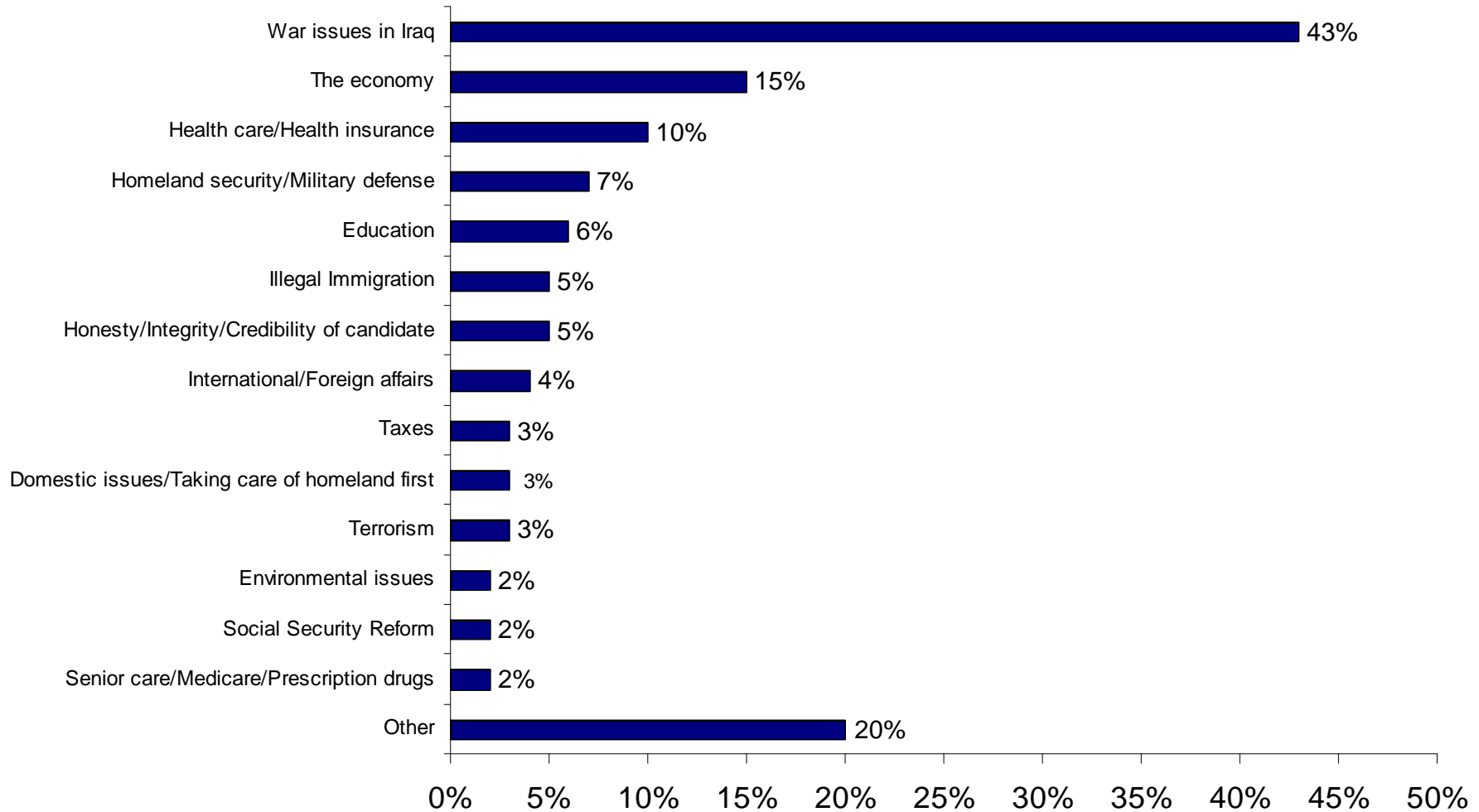
In making your decision about who to vote for (in 2008), will the issue of health care be very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?



Pew Research Center for the People and the Press/Princeton Survey Research Associates International, May 30 – June 3, 2007, 1503 Adults Nationwide

Health care is poised to be a top voting issue in 2008.

Looking ahead to next year's presidential election, what will be the most important issues that you will take into account when deciding whom to vote for? (open-ended, multiple response)



Gallup Poll, Election 2008 Survey, June 11-14, 2007
N=1007 Adults

Health Care in 2008

- It remains to be seen how important health care will be as a voting determinant in the 2008 Presidential election.
- Barring crisis, much of this will depend on the eventual nominees.
- More central to the Democrat candidates' messages than to the GOP at this point; however, all candidates are addressing health care;
- Most candidates are short on specifics;
- Democrats are more focused on universal health coverage through a variety of means including tax credits, the expansion of Medicare, Medicaid, SCHIP and the FEHB; employer and individual mandates; a strong federal role; the creation of a new public insurance program and emphasis on preventive care programs.
- Republicans tend to focus on using the tax code to make coverage more available (i.e. lower taxes/standard deduction for all who purchase insurance) and prefer free market solutions; more choices for individuals within a private-insurance market; more personal responsibility through expansion of HSAs/consumer-directed plans; shift away from employer-based coverage; the ability to purchase insurance across state lines; medical malpractice reform.

Health Care in 2008

- Even if a single party controls the White House and Congress, there is no guarantee that health reform will move forward or be successful.
- Many of the roadblocks faced by the Clinton Administration in 1993 still exist.
 - Uncertainty about universal coverage
 - Public aversion to a government-run system
 - Aversion to a large, costly bureaucracy
 - Perceived problems relating to access to care
 - the perception that the quality of coverage would decline for many Americans
 - the question of how to pay for expanded coverage
- So far, the candidates have avoided the “government-run” problem in their proposals or outlines. Even so, as Jon Oberlander of UNC points out, there are any number of other obstacles to reform.

Obstacles to Reform

- **Political Feasibility** -- designing a plan that ensures access, quality and cost control is not the same as creating a plan with a political strategy that will survive the legislative process.
- Stumbling blocks: Congress, the President, stakeholders, public opinion
- Perennial constraints: the structure of U.S. political institutions creates obstacles to any legislation let alone health reform which is controversial, ideologically divisive and threatening to powerful interests.
 - Divided government is common – often preferred
 - Even if the same party controls the White House and Congress, congressional support for presidential initiatives is not assured
 - Members of Congress act independently and introduce competing bills; difficult to reach consensus on a single piece of legislation
 - The internal organization of Congress creates a bias toward the status quo (must survive committees, subcommittees, overlapping jurisdictions, House, Senate, Conference, the President)
 - Reformers have to clear every hurdle

Obstacles to Reform

- **Structure of U.S. health care politics** – fundamental reform poses a threat to powerful interests invested in maintaining the status quo including:
 - Doctors
 - Hospitals
 - Insurers
 - Pharmaceutical Companies
- These groups are well funded and adept at operating within the system to block legislation that is opposed to their interests
- The public: most Americans are insured and generally satisfied with their own medical care and insurance; likely to oppose any reform that threatens to weaken their arrangements.
 - The public is also ambivalent about government power, suspicious of bureaucracy, and supportive of the concepts of individual responsibility and free markets. This bias leans toward incremental approaches and makes for effective media campaigns.
- **Problems relating to specific proposals** – the questions of cost control, access, quality, health IT, bureaucratic control, taxation will all come to bear.

Obstacles to Reform

- **Current political environment** – much will depend on the environment in which reform proposals are introduced in terms of:
 - Political alignments
 - Socioeconomic conditions
 - the public mood
 - the 2008 campaign
- All of these factors are subject to quick, frequent, unpredictable change.
- Current climate is much like the environment in 1991 that gave way to an activist health policy agenda:
 - War
 - Increasing uninsured
 - Federal deficits
 - Economic uncertainty
 - There are many differences, however. The coming wave of Baby Boom retirements may exert more pro-reform pressure than in the past. On the other hand, the war we are fighting today is protracted and dominates the political landscape at this point.

Pro-Reform Factors

- **Presidential campaign** – can raise the profile of reform
- **Public concern** about losing benefits and paying for family health care
- **Spiraling costs and public dissatisfaction** with rising costs
- **The growing problem of the uninsured** and public attention to the problem
- **Pro-Reform Alliances** -- The formation of pro-reform alliances with powerful members (Divided We Fail) could elevate public debate
- **Provider complaints** about reimbursement rates/cuts
- **State Medicaid budget woes**
- **Boomer retirements/future of Medicare**
- **The public agenda and the importance of health as a domestic issue**