



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
 Thursday, February 19, 2009

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
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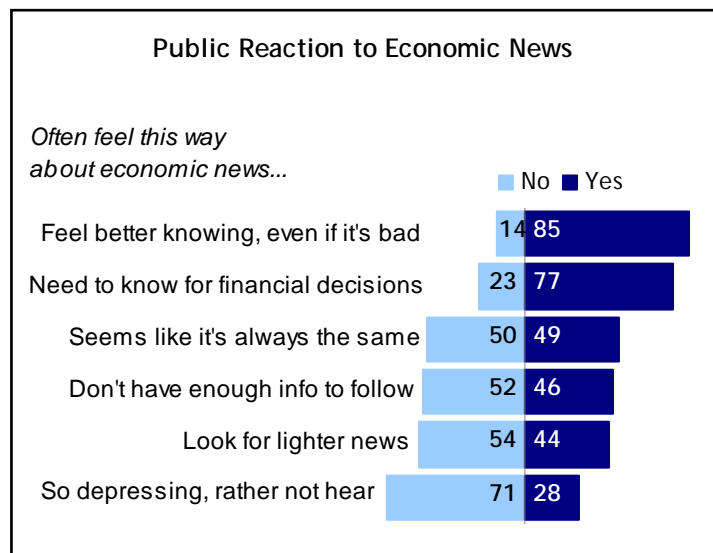
Stimulus Passage Tops News Coverage and Interest
MOST FEEL A PERSONAL STAKE IN TRACKING ECONOMIC NEWS

Americans continue to follow news about the economic crisis closely because they feel it is directly relevant to their lives. More than eight-in-ten (85%) say even when the economic news is bad they feel better knowing what's going on, while 77% say they need to stay on top of economic news because it matters in the financial decisions they make.

At the same time, close to half (46%) of the public says they often feel they don't have enough background information to follow economic news stories, according to the Pew Research Center's weekly News Interest Index survey conducted Feb. 13-16. As the crisis takes a heavy toll on jobs, homes, retirement savings and entire communities, 49% also say the economic news seems to be the same all the time with nothing ever really changing; another 44% say they find themselves looking for lighter news as a diversion from negative economic reports.

But relatively few are turning off economic news because it is too disheartening. Fewer than three-in-ten (28%) say they often feel the news is so depressing, they would rather not hear about it.

In fact, from the public's perspective, the economic news landscape is somewhat less bleak today than it was a few months ago. Conducted immediately after Congress approved the economic stimulus bill, the survey finds fewer people than in December saying they are hearing



“mostly bad news about the economy.” That percentage has declined from 80% to 60%, while the percentage saying they are hearing “a mix of good and bad news” jumped from 19% in December to 37%.

The economic crisis in general and President Obama’s push for stimulus legislation dominated what people followed in the news and what the news media covered last week. More than four-in-ten (44%) say congressional passage of the \$787 billion stimulus bill was the story they followed most closely last week, while 22% say they followed reports about the U.S. economy most closely. The separate News Coverage Index prepared by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) shows that economic stories filled 47% of the overall newshole last week. Looking more deeply, stories about the stimulus fight filled 28% of the newshole and stories about economic conditions filled 19%.

A Personal Stake

Of the reactions people have to economic news, the sense that it matters to them in their everyday lives is the most tightly linked to their level of attention. Those who say they are following economic news very closely are much more likely than those following less closely to say they need to stay on top of developments because they affect their financial decisions.

Relevance to Personal Finances a Driver of Attention to Economic News			
<i>Often feel this way about economic news...</i>	<i>Among those following economic news</i>		<i>Diff</i>
	<i>Very closely</i> %	<i>Less closely</i> %	
Feel better knowing, even if news is bad	91	79	+12
Need to know for financial decisions	91	60	+31
Seems like same news all the time	47	52	-5
Don't always have enough background info	40	54	-14
Find myself looking for lighter news	42	47	-5
So depressing I'd rather not hear	25	32	-7

About nine-in-ten (91%) of those following economic news very closely say they need to know for financial reasons, compared with 60% of those not following the news very closely.

In addition, 91% of those following economic news very closely say they feel better knowing what’s going on, even if the news is bad, compared with 79% of those following less closely. And the level of background information is also related to attention. Among those who say they are not following the coverage very closely, more than half (54%) say they feel they don’t have enough background information to follow economic news; four-in-ten of those following very closely say the same.

Feeling that the news is depressing or repetitive, however, appears to have little connection with levels of attention. Those who are following very closely are about as likely as those who are not to say they find themselves looking for lighter news to get away from the

negative economic news. The highly attentive are also about as likely as the less attentive to describe economic news as always the same.

Income is related to people’s reactions to the news, as the wealthiest households are significantly more likely than lower income ones to say they need to know about economic news so they can make financial decisions. More than eight-in-ten (83%) of those with household incomes above \$75,000 say they need to know for financial reasons, compared with 64% of households with incomes of less than \$30,000.

People in lower income households are more likely than those in wealthier ones to say the news seems to be the same all the time (54% vs. 39%), that they don’t feel they have enough background information to understand the economic news (50% vs. 36%), and that they find themselves looking for lighter news as a

<i>Often feel this way about economic news...</i>	<i>Household income</i>			<i>Diff*</i>
	<i>\$75k+</i>	<i>\$30-75k</i>	<i><\$30k</i>	
Feel better knowing, even if news is bad	91	89	77	+14
Need to know for financial decisions	83	81	64	+19
Seems like same news all the time	39	55	54	-15
Don't always have enough background info	36	51	50	-14
Find myself looking for lighter news	38	48	50	-12
So depressing I'd rather not hear	20	27	36	-16
N	269	286	221	

* This column represents the difference between respondents from high income (\$75k+) and low income (<\$30k) households.

diversion (50% vs. 38%). More than a third (36%) of those with household income below \$30,000 say they often find the news so depressing, they would rather not hear it, compared with 20% of those from households earning more than \$75,000.

Shift in Tone

Despite the continuing flow of bad economic news, more people now say they are hearing a mix of good and bad news than said so in December. In the latest survey, the number saying they are hearing mostly bad news has dropped from 80% to 60%. And the number saying they are hearing a mix of good and bad almost doubled from 19% to 37%.

As the Obama administration starts to implement its economic policies, those numbers show a widening partisan divide. The share of Republicans saying they are hearing mostly bad news is down only slightly from December – from 80% to 73%. But the proportion of Democrats and independents saying the same has dropped significantly. In December, 82% of Democrats said the news was mostly bad, while 56% say the same today. Three-quarters of independents (76%) characterized the economic news as mostly bad in December, compared with 55% today. The percentage of Republicans saying they are hearing mixed economic news increased slightly

from 19% in December to 26% today. Among Democrats, that percentage jumped from 17% to 41%. Among independents, it rose from 22% to 40%.

	---Dec 2008---			---Jan 2009---			---Feb 2009---			Feb 2009
	<u>Good</u> %	<u>Bad</u> %	<u>Mixed</u> %	<u>Good</u> %	<u>Bad</u> %	<u>Mixed</u> %	<u>Good</u> %	<u>Bad</u> %	<u>Mixed</u> %	<u>N</u>
Total	1	80	19	2	67	30	2	60	37	1002
Republican	*	80	19	1	68	30	*	73	26	262
Democrat	1	82	17	2	67	30	3	56	41	340
Independent	1	76	22	2	69	28	3	55	40	337
\$75k+	1	81	17	*	77	23	2	73	25	269
\$30k-75k	*	84	16	2	75	23	1	62	37	286
<\$30k	1	71	27	2	54	43	5	43	50	221

Question: Are you hearing mostly good news about the economy these days, mostly bad news about the economy or a mix of both good and bad news?

Income also seems to be a factor as significantly more of those in the middle and lower economic brackets now say that coverage of economic news has been a mix of good and bad. Among those with household incomes of more than \$75,000, 25% say they are hearing a mix of good and bad economic news, up from 17% in December. Among those with household incomes between \$30,000 and \$75,000, that percentage jumped from 16% in December to 37% today. Among those with household incomes of less than \$30,000, the share that says they are hearing a mix of good and bad economic news has risen from 27% in December to 50% in the current survey.

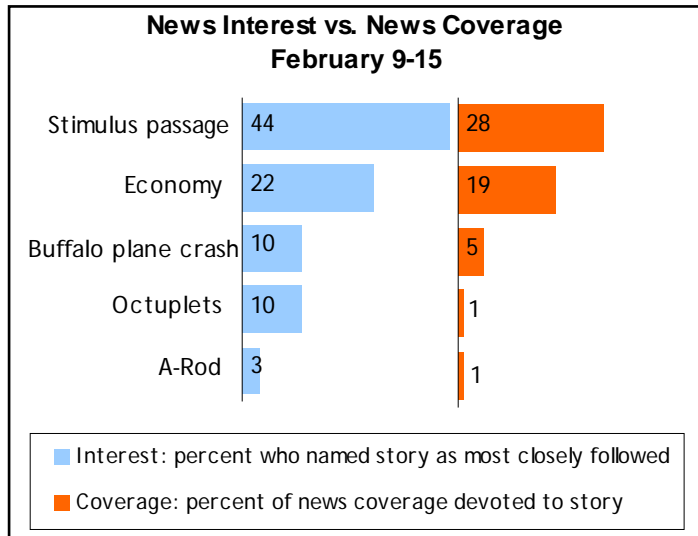
Other Top Stories of the Week

While news about the economic crisis and the stimulus package continued to attract the most interest last week, a deadly plane crash near Buffalo, N.Y., also drew considerable public attention. About a third (32%) of Americans followed the crash involving Continental Connection flight 3407 very

Recent plane crash stories...	% following very closely
TWA flight crash off NY coast {7-96}	69
American Airlines crash near JFK {11-01}	48
US Airways lands in Hudson River {1-09}	44
Alaska Airlines crash near L.A. {2-00}	35
Columbian airliner crash near JFK {2-90}	33
Continental flight crash near Buffalo, NY {2-09}	32
EgyptAir crash off New England coast {12-99}	30
American Airlines crash in Arkansas {6-99}	19

closely. The airline tragedy was the top story for 10% of the public. According to PEJ's analysis, news coverage of the crash, which occurred late in the week, made up 5% of the newshole. The accident in Buffalo did not attract the same level of public interest as last month's dramatic emergency landing of a U.S. Airways jet in the Hudson River, where all on the plane survived.

The story of the California mother and her newborn octuplets continued to capture headlines and public interest. One-in-ten said the octuplets was their most closely followed story of the week, equal to the percentage citing the Continental plane crash. About one-in-four (26%) followed this news very closely compared with 23% during the previous week. The media, for its part, devoted 1% of total newshole to this story.



New York Yankee Alex Rodriguez made headlines last week when he admitted to using performance enhancing drugs from 2001 to 2003 when he played for the Texas Rangers. About one-in-ten (11%) followed news about his admission very closely, while 3% cited this as their most closely followed story. News about Rodriguez accounted for 1% of all news last week, making him the fourth biggest newsmaker behind President Obama, Senator Judd Gregg and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner. News about Rodriguez using banned substances attracted almost as much interest as coverage of pitcher Roger Clemens testifying before Congress in February, 2008 about alleged steroid use.

These findings are based on the most recent installment of the weekly News Interest Index, an ongoing project of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The index, building on the Center’s longstanding research into public attentiveness to major news stories, examines news interest as it relates to the news media’s coverage. The weekly survey is conducted in conjunction with The Project for Excellence in Journalism’s News Coverage Index, which monitors the news reported by major newspaper, television, radio and online news outlets on an ongoing basis. In the most recent week, data relating to news coverage were collected from February 9-15, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected February 13-16, 2009 from a nationally representative sample of 1,002 adults.

About the News Interest Index

The *News Interest Index* is a weekly survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press aimed at gauging the public's interest in and reaction to major news events.

This project has been undertaken in conjunction with the Project for Excellence in Journalism's *News Coverage Index*, an ongoing content analysis of the news. The News Coverage Index catalogues the news from top news organizations across five major sectors of the media: newspapers, network television, cable television, radio and the internet. Each week (from Sunday through Friday) PEJ compiles this data to identify the top stories for the week. The News Interest Index survey collects data from Friday through Monday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for the weekly surveys are based on telephone interviews among a nationwide sample of approximately 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, conducted under the direction of ORC (Opinion Research Corporation). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls, and that results based on subgroups will have larger margins of error.

For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to www.journalism.org.

About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
FEBRUARY 13-16, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
TOPLINE
N=1,002

Q.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] [IF NECESSARY “Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?”]

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy	55	29	10	6	*=100
January 30-February 2, 2009	52	31	12	5	*=100
January 23-26, 2009	57	30	8	5	0=100
January 16-19, 2009	43	35	13	9	*=100
January 2-4, 2009	42	36	15	7	*=100
December 12-15, 2008	51	33	9	7	*=100
December 5-8, 2008	42	38	13	7	*=100
November 21-24, 2008	59	24	9	8	*=100
November 14-17, 2008	56	29	9	6	*=100
November 7-10, 2008	54	31	8	7	*=100
October 31-November 3, 2008	63	27	6	4	*=100
October 24-27, 2008	52	35	7	5	1=100
October 17-20, 2008	62	29	6	3	*=100
October 10-13, 2008	65	25	7	3	*=100
October 3-6, 2008	69	23	5	3	*=100
September 26-29, 2008	70	22	5	3	*=100
September 19-22, 2008	56	27	12	5	*=100
September 5-8, 2008	44	33	16	7	*=100
August 29-31, 2008	41	34	13	11	1=100
August 15-18, 2008	39	36	15	10	*=100
August 8-11, 2008	39	35	16	10	*=100
August 1-4, 2008	47	34	11	8	0=100
July 25-28, 2008	46	32	10	12	*=100
July 18-21, 2008	45	33	13	9	*=100
July 11-14, 2008	44	33	12	10	1=100
June 27-30, 2008	49	31	12	7	1=100
June 13-16, 2008	42	33	14	11	*=100
May 9-12, 2008	45	31	13	11	*=100
May 2-5, 2008	43	31	15	10	1=100
April 18-21, 2008	41	35	13	10	1=100
April 4-7, 2008	39	37	12	12	*=100
March 28-31, 2008	42	36	14	8	*=100
March 20-24, 2008	45	33	13	9	*=100
February 29-March 3, 2008	38	35	15	11	1=100
February 15-18, 2008	37	36	11	16	8=100
February 1-4, 2008	40	37	14	8	1=100
January 18-21, 2008	42	31	16	11	*=100
January 11-14, 2008	36	32	15	16	1=100
November 2-5, 2007	27	37	16	19	1=100
October 19-22, 2007	25	34	20	21	*=100
August 10-13, 2007	28	36	18	18	*=100
Mid-November, 2006	31	40	17	11	1=100
December, 2005	35	35	18	11	1=100
Early November, 2005	35	39	17	9	*=100

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
Mid-May, 2005	30	39	19	11	1=100
January, 2005	35	41	17	7	*=100
Mid-October, 2004	30	43	16	10	1=100
Early September, 2004	39	34	15	11	1=100
Mid-January, 2004	37	41	15	7	*=100
December, 2003	35	38	14	11	2=100
November, 2003	40	34	15	10	1=100
October, 2003	32	39	16	12	1=100
September, 2003	39	30	18	12	1=100
March, 2003	40	35	16	8	1=100
February, 2003	42	33	15	10	*=100
January, 2003	40	35	13	11	1=100
December, 2002	38	34	17	10	1=100
February, 2002	35	40	15	9	1=100
January, 2002	30	44	16	9	1=100
December, 2001	37	40	13	8	2=100
Mid-November, 2001	41	36	15	7	1=100
June, 2001	24	41	18	16	1=100
May, 2001	34	36	15	15	0=100
April, 2001	36	34	16	13	1=100
February, 2001	30	39	18	12	1=100
January, 2001	32	38	17	11	2=100
June, 1995	26	41	22	11	*=100
March, 1995	27	45	19	9	*=100
February, 1995	23	41	22	13	1=100
December, 1994	28	43	20	9	*=100
October, 1994	27	40	20	12	1=100
June, 1994	25	42	23	10	*=100
May, 1994	33	40	16	10	1=100
January, 1994	34	39	16	10	1=100
Early January, 1994	36	44	13	7	*=100
December, 1993	35	41	15	8	1=100
October, 1993	33	38	20	9	*=100
September, 1993	37	40	14	8	1=100
Early September, 1993	39	39	14	9	*=100
August, 1993	41	36	14	9	*=100
May, 1993	37	38	18	6	1=100
February, 1993	49	36	10	5	*=100
January, 1993	42	39	12	7	*=100
September, 1992	43	37	13	6	1=100
May, 1992	39	39	15	6	1=100
March, 1992	47	38	11	4	*=100
February, 1992	47	37	10	6	*=100
January, 1992	44	40	11	5	*=100
October, 1991	36	38	16	9	1=100
b. Congress passing Barack Obama's economic stimulus plan	50	32	13	5	*=100
February 6-9, 2009¹	41	33	15	11	*=100
January 30-February 2, 2009	36	29	22	13	*=100

¹ January 30-February 2, 2009 and February 6-9, 2009 asked about "The debate in Congress over Barack Obama's economic stimulus plan."

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	Very <u>Closely</u>	Fairly <u>Closely</u>	Not too <u>Closely</u>	Not at all <u>Closely</u>	DK/ <u>Refused</u>
TREND FOR COMPARISON:²					
January 16-19, 2009: <i>Debate in Washington over the nation's economic problems</i>	35	33	17	15	*=100
December 19-22, 2008: <i>Bush administration plan for emergency loans to U.S. automakers</i>	37	33	16	13	1=100
December 12-15, 2008: <i>Debate over a government bailout for U.S. auto industry</i>	40	33	18	9	*=100
December 5-8, 2008: <i>Debate in Congress over a bailout for U.S. auto industry</i>	34	38	17	11	*=100
November 21-24, 2008	41	26	17	15	1=100
October 3-6, 2008: <i>Washington debates plan to stabilize markets</i>	62	26	7	5	*=100
September 26-29, 2008	60	22	10	8	*=100
September 19-22, 2008: <i>Wall Street turmoil</i>	49	28	14	9	*=100
September 12-15, 2008: <i>Government takeover of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac</i>	28	35	19	17	1=100
March 20-24, 2008: <i>Bear Stearns buyout</i>	21	26	21	32	*=100
February 8-11, 2008: <i>Bush and Congress agreeing on an economic stimulus plan</i>	22	33	23	21	1=100
January 25-28, 2008	24	36	19	21	*=100
August, 1989: <i>Savings and loan bailout</i>	26	30	20	23	1=100
c. Alex Rodriguez admitting that he used performance-enhancing drugs	11	20	33	36	0=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:³					
Feb. 15-18, 2008: <i>Roger Clemens/Congress</i>	13	20	24	42	1=100
Dec. 14-17, 2007: <i>Mitchell Report</i>	16	24	29	31	*=100
March, 2005: <i>Reports of Steroid Use</i>	18	34	24	23	1=100
December, 2004: <i>Reports of Steroid Use</i>	22	28	23	27	0=100
d. A 10-year-old dog named Stump winning the Westminster dog show	5	12	21	61	1=100
e. A plane crashing into a house near Buffalo, New York, killing 50 people	32	39	16	13	*=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
Jan. 16-19, 2009: <i>Plane landing in Hudson</i>	44	34	14	8	*=100
November, 2001: <i>Crash of an American Airlines plane near JFK Airport in New York</i>	48	34	13	4	1=100
February, 2000: <i>Crash of an Alaskan Airlines jet near Los Angeles</i>	35	40	17	8	*=100

² January 16-19, 2009 asked about "The debate in Washington over what the government should do about the nation's economic problems." December 19-22, 2008 asked about "The Bush administration's plan to provide billions in emergency loans to U.S. automakers." December 12-15, 2008 asked about "The debate over a government bailout for the U.S. auto industry." November 21-24, 2008 and December 5-8, 2008 asked about "The debate in Congress over a government bailout for the U.S. auto industry." September 26-29, 2008 and October 3-6, 2008 asked about "The debate in Washington over a plan to use government funds to stabilize financial markets." September 19-22, 2008 asked about "Turmoil among major financial institutions on Wall Street." September 12-15, 2008 asked about "The federal government taking control of the mortgage companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac." March 20-24, 2008 asked about "The buyout of Wall Street investment bank Bear Stearns." January 25-28, 2008 and February 8-11, 2008 asked about "President Bush and Congress agreeing on an economic stimulus plan." August, 1989 asked about: "Passage in Congress of a bill to bailout ailing savings and loan institutions."

³ For February 15-18, 2008, the story was listed as "Roger Clemens testifying before Congress about steroid use." December 14-17, 2007 the story was listed as "A report on steroid and performance-enhancing drug use in Major League Baseball." In March 2005 and December, 2005, the story was listed as "Recent reports of steroid use by some Major League Baseball players."

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
December 1999: <i>Crash of EgyptAir plane off the coast of New England and its investigation</i>	30	44	15	10	1=100
June, 1999: <i>Crash of an American Airlines flight in Arkansas</i>	19	38	25	17	1=100
March, 1999: <i>The derailment of an Amtrak train in Illinois</i>	29	39	19	12	1=100
July 1996: <i>Crash of a Paris-bound TWA plane off the coast of New York</i>	69	23	6	2	*=100
February 1996: <i>Recent train crashes in Maryland, Colorado and New Jersey</i>	24	40	24	11	1=100
September, 1993: <i>Amtrak train wreck in Alabama</i>	40	37	15	7	1=100
February, 1990: <i>Crash of Columbian airliner near JFK airport in New York</i>	33	39	18	10	0=100

f. A California mother of six who recently gave birth to octuplets after receiving fertility treatment	26	33	24	17	*=100
February 6-9, 2008	23	33	27	17	*=100

Q.2 Which ONE of the stories I just mentioned have you followed most closely, or is there another story you've been following MORE closely? [**DO NOT READ LIST. ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE.**]

44	Congress passing Barack Obama's economic stimulus plan
22	Reports about the conditions of the U.S. economy
10	A plane crashing into a house near Buffalo, New York, killing 50 people
10	A California mother of six who recently gave birth to octuplets after receiving fertility treatment
3	Alex Rodriguez admitting that he used performance-enhancing drugs
1	A 10-year-old dog named stump winning the Westminster dog show
4	Some other story (VOL.)
<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	

Q.3 I'm going to read you a list of some of the ways that people feel about economic news? For each one, please tell me if you often feel this way, or not. First, [**READ AND RANDOMIZE**]. Do you often feel this way about economic news, or not?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	(VOL.) Don't know/ <u>Refused</u>
a. It seems like the same economic news all the time, nothing ever really changes	49	50	1=100
b. I don't always have enough background information to follow economic news stories	46	52	2=100
c. The economic news can be so depressing, I'd rather not hear about it	28	71	1=100
d. I feel better knowing what's going on, even if the news is bad	85	14	1=100

Q.3 CONTINUED...

		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	(VOL.) Don't know/ <u>Refused</u>
e.	I need to stay on top of economic news because it matters in the financial decisions I make	77	23	*=100
f.	I find myself looking for lighter news to get away from the negative economic news	44	54	2=100

[PLEASE PLACE Q.4 IN DIFFERENT MODULE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE]

On another topic...

Q.4 Are you hearing mostly good news about the economy these days, mostly bad news about the economy or a mix of both good and bad news?

		Jan 16-19 <u>2009</u>	Dec 5-8 <u>2008</u>
2	Hearing mostly good news about the economy	2	1
60	Hearing mostly bad news about the economy [OR]	67	80
37	A mix of good and bad	30	19
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL. DO NOT READ)	<u>1</u>	<u>*</u>
100		100	100