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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
 Andrew Kohut, Director
 Michael Remez, Senior Writer

Limbaugh Flap Draws More Coverage Than Interest
MANY WOULD SHRUG IF THEIR LOCAL NEWSPAPER CLOSED

As many newspapers struggle to stay economically viable, fewer than half of Americans (43%) say that losing their local newspaper would hurt civic life in their community “a lot.” Even fewer (33%) say they would personally miss reading the local newspaper a lot if it were no longer available.

Not unexpectedly, those who get local news regularly from newspapers are much more likely than those who read less often to see the potential shutdown of a local paper as a significant loss. More than half of regular newspaper readers (56%) say that if the local newspaper they read most often no longer published – either in print or online – it would hurt the civic life of the community a lot; an almost identical percentage (55%) says they would personally miss reading the paper a lot if it were no longer available.

If Your Local Newspaper Closed ...			
	<i>Get local news from newspapers*</i>		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Reg-ularly</u>	<u>Less often</u>
<i>How much would it hurt civic life?</i>	%	%	%
A lot	43	56	30
Some	31	25	36
Not much	15	12	19
Not at all	8	6	10
Don't know	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>
	100	100	100
<i>How much would you miss it?</i>			
A lot	33	55	12
Some	25	25	25
Not much	16	10	21
Not at all	26	10	42
Don't know	<u>*</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>*</u>
	100	100	100

* Includes print and online newspapers.

The latest weekly News Interest Index, conducted March 6-9 by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, finds that the public is continuing to pay close attention to news about the economic crisis and President Obama’s agenda. About a quarter (26%) say the unveiling of Obama’s plan to set aside \$630 billion toward overhauling the U.S. health care system was the story they followed most closely last week. Nearly one-in-five (18% each) say their top story was the rising unemployment rate or the major drops in the stock market.

The economic crisis continued to dominate news coverage as well. When combining the ongoing story lines, crisis coverage accounted for 43% of the total newshole, according to a separate analysis by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ).

The political skirmish over Rush Limbaugh’s role in the Republican Party accounted for 8% of the newshole, making it the second most reported story of the week. But the GOP story appears to have registered less with the public; only 4% say it was the story they followed most closely.

Newspapers’ Struggles

With media coverage of newspaper company bankruptcy filings, threats to close papers, actual shut downs and continuing job cuts, the public is aware of the financial problems. More than half (53%) say they have heard “a lot” about the problems facing newspapers, while 31% say they have heard “a little.” Only 15% say they have heard nothing at all.

When it comes to local news, more people say they get that news from local television stations than any other source. About two-thirds (68%) say they regularly get local news from television reports or television station websites, 48% say they regularly get news from local newspapers in print or online, 34% say they get local news regularly from radio and 31% say they get their local news, more generally, from the internet.

Regular Sources of Local News	
<i>Gets news from this source 'regularly'</i>	<u>Percent</u>
TV	66
Newspaper	41
Radio	34
Internet	31
Online Newspapers	13
Online TV	11
Net Television (Print/online)	68
Net Newspaper (Print/online)	48

Newspapers have long struggled to attract younger readers. A recent analysis of newspaper readership by Pew Research found that just 27% of Generation Y – those born in 1977 or later – read a newspaper the previous day. That compares with 55% of those in the Silent or Greatest Generations, born prior to 1946. (*For more, see [“Newspapers Face a Challenging Calculus,” Feb. 26, 2009 Commentary.](#)*)

Not unexpectedly, far fewer young people than older Americans say they would miss their local newspaper a lot if it were to close. Less than a quarter of those younger than 40 (23%) say they would miss the local newspaper they read most often a lot if it were to go out of business or shut down. That compares with 33% of those ages 40 to 64 and 55% of those 65 and older.

However, many more of those younger than 40 (41%) say the shutdown of their local newspaper would hurt the civic life in their community a lot. About the same proportion of those ages 40 to 64 (42%) express that view, as do 51% of those 65 and older.

Democrats and independents are more likely to say their communities would be hurt by the loss of the local newspaper than Republicans. About half of Democrats (49%) and 47% of independents say civic life would be hurt “a lot” if the newspaper shut down, compared with 33% of Republicans.

For Younger People, Demise of Local Paper Would Be No Great Loss				
<i>Closure of local paper would hurt civic life...</i>				
	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>not at all</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
Total	43	31	23	3=100
18-39	41	31	24	4=100
40-64	42	32	24	2=100
65+	51	26	21	2=100
<i>Would personally miss it ...</i>				
	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>not at all</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
Total	33	25	42	*=100
18-39	23	29	48	0=100
40-64	33	24	43	*=100
65+	55	19	26	*=100

Debating Local Newspaper's Role

Among those who say the loss of the local daily paper would hurt civic life a lot, three-in-ten say people rely on the paper to know what is going on in their community.

Another 18% say, more generally, that people in their area read the paper. Some 12% note that their

community has only one newspaper, while 10% point to their own familiarity or enjoyment of the paper. Another 6% say the paper provides better or more in-depth coverage than does television news, and 6% worry that jobs would be lost if the paper closed.

“I think communities don’t realize how dependent they are. We learn more about ourselves when we learn about our neighbors,” one respondent said. “A local newspaper gives a community the opportunity to grieve together; an example is 9/11. It also lets us celebrate the good things -- when our teams win, it’s a big deal.”

Many of those who say the closing of the local paper wouldn’t make much, if any, difference in their communities note that there are other news sources available or criticize the newspaper’s quality. About three-in-ten (29%) say there are other ways to get news, including television and radio news and the internet. One-in-five say the quality of the newspaper is poor, while 5% say it is biased. One-in-ten say they don’t read the paper and almost as many (9%) say they don’t think other people read it either.

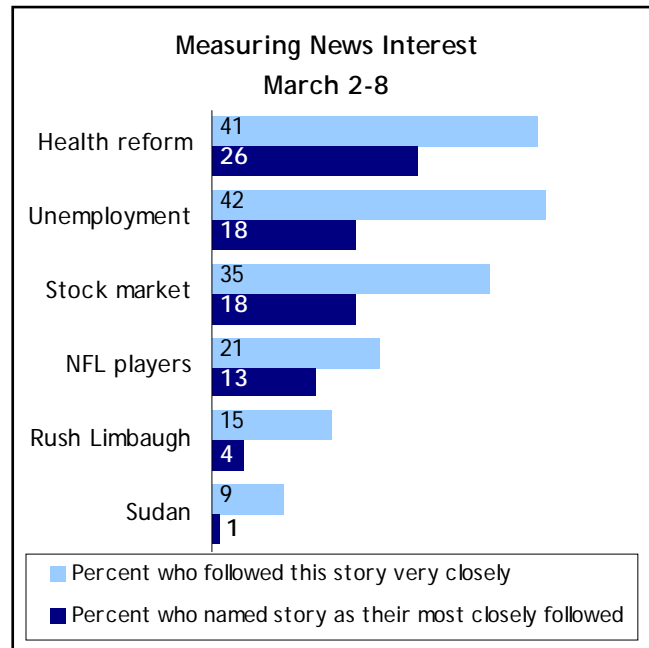
“There are other forms of communication that are more important and easier to follow. I either go to television or turn on the radio in my car,” said one person who believes the closure of the local paper would make no difference to civic life.

Why Loss of Local Newspaper Would Hurt Civic Life ...	
<i>Based on those who say loss of paper would hurt civil life a lot (N=449)</i>	
30%	People rely on the paper for local news
18	People read/rely on the paper for news, generally
12	There is only one paper in this community
10	Reading the newspaper is a habit/I enjoy it
Why It Would Not	
<i>Based on those who say it would hurt civil life not much/not at all (N=227)</i>	
29%	There are other ways to get news, including TV, radio, internet
20	The quality of the newspaper is poor
10	I don’t read the newspaper
9	I don’t think other people read the newspaper

Health Care Reform and Economy Dominate Public Interest

Economic stories continue to dominate public attention and media coverage as news about major drops in the stock market and the continuing loss of American jobs place stress on the U.S. economy. The public's top story of the week, Obama's initial plans for overhauling the U.S. health care system, drew considerable public attention but received a smaller share of total press coverage compared with economic news overall.

Barack Obama's proposal for a \$630 billion fund to reform the health care system attracted the very close attention of 41% of Americans. Interest in this was high despite the fact that news organizations devoted only 4% of the total news coverage to this story, according to the PEJ analysis. More Democrats than Republicans were very closely following the president's health care plans (49% vs. 38%).



Public interest in news about the rising unemployment rate has remained high and generally stable over the last five months. Since early November, roughly four-in-ten Americans have reported following rising unemployment news very closely. Last week, 42% followed the story very closely and, for nearly two-in-ten (18%), this was their top story of the week. According to PEJ, the media devoted 5% of newshole to unemployment.

More than a third (35%) paid very closely attention to recent major drops in the stock market and 18% said this was the single news story they followed more closely than any other. The media devoted 6% of coverage to stock market stories. A plurality of people (45%) with annual family incomes of \$75,000 or more paid very close attention to the declining stock market last week, compared with 34% of those with incomes between \$30,000 and \$75,000, and 23% of those with incomes of less \$30,000.

The debate over Rush Limbaugh's influence over the Republican Party and the verbal sparring between White House officials and Limbaugh himself generated a great deal of news coverage (8% of total news). The Limbaugh story received the greatest attention from cable

**Modest Interest in Debate
over Limbaugh's Influence**

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
<i>Following Limbaugh...</i>	%	%	%	%
Very closely	15	21	11	13
Fairly closely	19	21	22	15
Not too closely	23	21	23	25
Not at all closely	43	37	44	47
Don't know	*	0	*	0
	100	100	100	100

news networks (17%) and radio outlets (15%), according to PEJ. Public interest, though, was less intense. Just 15% of Americans reported following news about Limbaugh very closely and 4% said this was their top story of the week. More Republicans (21%) than Democrats (11%) very closely followed news about Limbaugh's influence over the GOP. Pluralities of both independents (47%) and Democrats (44%) reported following this story "not at all closely."

An arrest warrant for the president of Sudan on charges of war crimes in the Darfur region did not register highly with the American public. Nearly one-in-ten (9%) followed this story very closely and just 1% listed this as their top story.

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 March 2-8, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected March 6-9, 2009 from a nationally representative sample of 1,001 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:

Andrew Kohut, Director
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors
Kim Parker, Senior Researcher
Michael Remez, Senior Writer
Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Robert Suls, Shawn Neidorf, Leah Christian and Jocelyn Kiley
Research Associates
Kathleen Holzward and Alec Tyson, Research Analysts

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
MARCH 6-9, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
TOPLINE
N=1,001

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 rising unemployment rate	42	33	13	11	1=100
February 6-9, 2009	44	36	11	9	*=100
January 9-12, 2009	45	34	14	7	*=100
December 5-8, 2008	40	33	17	10	*=100
November 7-10, 2008	39	32	17	12	*=100
June 6-9, 2008	25	31	23	21	*=100
b. Debate over Rush Limbaugh’s influence over the Republican Party	15	19	23	43	*=100
c. The two NFL players missing off Florida’s Gulf Coast	21	34	25	20	*=100
d. Barack Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling the U.S. health care system	41	32	13	14	*=100
e. An arrest warrant for the president of Sudan on charges of war crimes in Darfur	9	19	24	48	*=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON:¹					
June 1-4, 2007: Ethnic Violence in Darfur	12	22	29	36	1=100
December, 2006	13	23	29	34	1=100
May, 2006	16	22	27	33	2=100
July, 2004: <i>Ethnic Violence in Sudan</i>	14	22	27	35	2=100
f. Recent major drops in the U.S. stock market	35	31	15	19	*=100
February 20-23, 2009	31	32	20	17	*=100
November 21-24, 2008	50	23	15	12	*=100
October 17-20, 2008²	54	31	9	6	*=100
October 10-13, 2008	59	26	9	6	*=100
July 3-7, 2008	22	29	23	26	*=100
March 14-17, 2008	25	31	23	21	*=100
January 25-28, 2008	29	28	19	23	1=100
August 17-20, 2007	21	24	22	33	*=100
July 27-30, 2007	15	26	21	37	1=100
March 2-5, 2007	21	28	25	26	*=100
Early September, 2002	27	30	20	22	1=100

¹ May, 2006 through June 1-4, 2007 asked about “Ethnic violence in the Darfur region of Sudan.” July, 2004, asked about “Ethnic violence in Sudan.”

² October 17-20, 2008 asked about “Recent major ups and downs in the U.S. stock market.” March 2-5, 2007 asked about “The recent drop in the U.S. stock market.” In Early November, 1997, the story was listed as “Thinking about last Monday when the stock market dropped, how closely did you follow what was happening?” From February, 1996 to Mid-November, 1997, the story was listed as “Recent major ups and downs in the stock market.” For all other dates, the story was listed as “Recent major ups and downs in the U.S. stock market.”

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>
Late July, 2002	33	33	15	18	1=100
March, 2001	27	27	18	27	1=100
Mid-October, 2000	20	26	23	31	1=100
April, 2000	18	28	23	31	*=100
Early April, 2000	19	29	20	32	*=100
March, 2000	23	29	21	26	1=100
March, 1999	18	29	22	31	*=100
January, 1999	24	28	19	28	1=100
Early September, 1998	32	31	20	17	*=100
Mid-August, 1998	17	23	21	39	*=100
January, 1998	21	25	23	31	*=100
Early November, 1997	16	29	22	33	*=100
Mid-November, 1997	25	36	18	20	1=100
September, 1997	14	22	23	40	1=100
April, 1997	17	21	22	40	*=100
February, 1996	12	20	25	42	1=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.]**

- 26 Barack Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling the U.S. health care system
 - 18 Reports about the rising unemployment rate
 - 18 Major drops in the stock market
 - 13 The two NFL players missing off Florida's Gulf Coast
 - 4 Debate over Rush Limbaugh's influence over the Republican Party
 - 1 An arrest warrant for the president of Sudan on charges of war crimes in Darfur
 - 11 Some other story (VOL.)
 - 2 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
- 100

Q.3 I have a few questions about where you get your LOCAL NEWS – that is news about people, events and politics in your area. How often, if ever, do you get local news **[INSERT, RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>Regularly</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Hardly ever</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. From newspapers	41	23	17	19	0=100
b. On the internet	31	23	15	31	*=100
c. On television	66	18	10	6	*=100
d. On the radio	34	26	20	20	*=100

IF INTERNET (1-3 IN Q.3b) ASK [N=614]:

Thinking about the internet...

Q.4 How often, if ever, do you get LOCAL NEWS from [INSERT, RANDOMIZE]?

		<u>Regularly</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Hardly ever</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>
a.	Newspaper websites	20	27	27	26	*=100
b.	The websites of TV stations in your area	16	29	24	31	*=100

BASED ON TOTAL:

		-----Gets local news online-----					No local news online	<u>DK/Refused</u>
		<u>Regularly</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Hardly ever</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>	<u>online</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>
a.	Newspaper websites	13	19	19	18	*	31	*=100
b.	The websites of TV stations in your area	11	20	17	21	*	31	*=100

ASK ALL:

Q.5 How much if anything, have you heard about growing financial problems at national and local newspapers? Have you heard a lot, a little or nothing at all?

53	A lot
31	A little
15	Nothing at all
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused [VOL. DO NOT READ]
100	

Q.6 Now I'd like you to think about the local daily newspaper in your area. If there is more than one, think about the one you read most often. If that newspaper went out of business and no longer published in print or online, how much would this hurt civic life in your community? Would you say... [READ IN ORDER]

43	A lot
31	Some
15	Not much
8	Not at all
<u>3</u>	Don't know/Refused [VOL. DO NOT READ]
100	

Q.6 Now I'd like you to think about the local daily newspaper in your area. If there is more than one, think about the one you read most often. If that newspaper went out of business and no longer published in print or online, how much would this hurt civic life in your community? Would you say... **[READ IN ORDER]**

IF Q.6= 1-4, ASK [N=973]:

Q.7 Why do you say that?

[IF NECESSARY, PROBE FULLY FOR SPECIFICS: Why do you think it would or would not hurt civic life in your community?] [OPEN END. RECORD ALL MENTIONS ON ONE SCREEN.]

BASED ON RESPONDENTS WHO SAID THIS WOULD HURT CIVIC LIFE IN THEIR COMMUNITY 'A LOT' [N=449]

30 People rely on the newspaper for local news/to know what's going on
18 A lot of people read/rely on the newspaper
12 There is only one paper in the community
10 Reading the newspaper is a habit/I always read it/I enjoy it/I'm used to it
6 Newspaper news is better/more in-depth/more local than TV news/I don't watch TV news
6 Newspaper employment/Loss of jobs if newspaper closed
4 The newspaper is important to civic life
3 Newspaper ads or coupons
3 Senior citizens rely on the newspaper, including those who do not have internet access
3 Not everyone has the internet/Some people lack news options other than the newspaper
2 Newspapers are independent voices/Newspapers provide higher-quality coverage
2 The newspaper provides non-local/national news coverage
2 People communicate through the newspaper
1 There are other ways to get news, including TV, radio and the internet
11 Other
2 Don't know/Refused

Note: Total adds to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

BASED ON RESPONDENTS WHO SAID THIS WOULD HURT CIVIC LIFE IN THEIR COMMUNITY 'SOME' [N=297]

23 People rely on the newspaper for local news/to know what's going on
14 There are other ways to get news, including TV, radio and the internet
13 A lot of people read/rely on the newspaper
7 Newspaper employment/Loss of jobs if newspaper closed
6 Not everyone has the internet/Some people lack news options other than the newspaper
5 The quality of the newspaper is poor
4 I don't think other people read the newspaper
4 Newspaper ads or coupons
4 There is only one paper in the community
3 I don't read the newspaper
3 Reading the newspaper is a habit/I always read it/I enjoy it/I'm used to it
2 The newspaper is biased
2 The newspaper lacks national coverage
2 Senior citizens rely on the newspaper, including those who do not have internet access
2 Newspaper news is better/more in-depth/more local than TV news/I don't watch TV news
1 The newspaper is important to civic life
1 The newspaper provides non-local/national news coverage
1 Young people don't read the newspaper
21 Other
3 Don't know/Refused

Note: Total adds to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

BASED ON RESPONDENTS WHO SAID THIS WOULD HURT CIVIC LIFE IN THEIR COMMUNITY 'NOT MUCH' OR 'NOT AT ALL' [N=227]

29	There are other ways to get news, including TV, radio and the internet
20	The quality of the newspaper is poor
10	I don't read the newspaper
9	I don't think other people read the newspaper
5	The newspaper is biased
1	Newspaper employment/Loss of jobs if newspaper closed
22	Other
10	Don't know/Refused

Note: Total adds to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

ASK ALL:

Q.8 How much would you personally miss reading your local daily newspaper if it were no longer available? [READ]

33	A lot
25	Some
16	Not much
26	Not at all
*	Don't know/Refused [VOL. DO NOT READ]
100	

TREND FOR COMPARISON:

BASED ON RESPONDENTS WHO REGULARLY READ A DAILY NEWSPAPER:

On a different subject...

How much would you miss reading the newspaper, if newspapers were no longer available? [READ CATEGORIES]

<u>April</u> <u>2008</u>		<u>April</u> <u>2002</u>	<u>April</u> <u>1998</u>	<u>June</u> <u>1995</u>	<u>Feb</u> <u>1994</u>
59	A lot	57	60	58	67
22	Some	26	25	27	21
11	Not much	10	10	10	8
7	Not at all	7	4	4	4
1	Don't know/Ref. [VOL. DO NOT READ]	*	1	1	*
100		100	100	100	100