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## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Trust For America's Health

**From:** The Mellman Group, Inc.  
Public Opinion Strategies

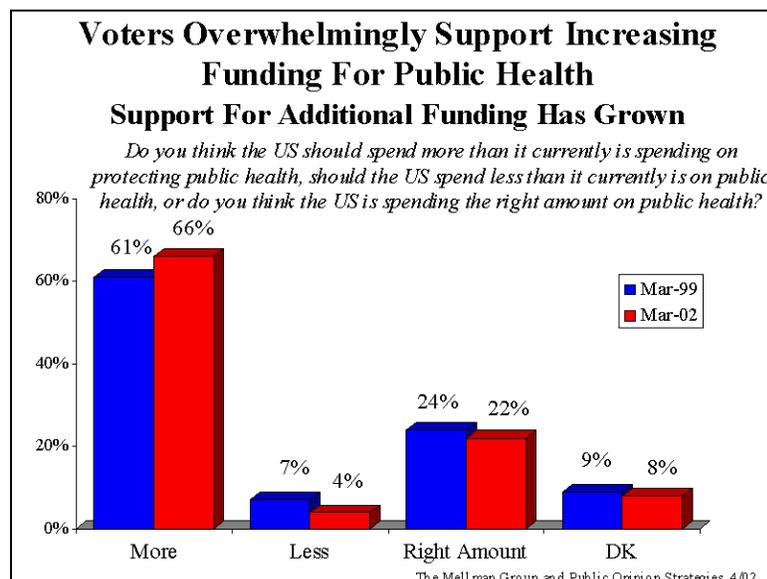
**RE:** National Survey On Public Perceptions of Risk from Bioterrorism and Other Health Threats

**Date:** Wednesday, May 15, 2002

*This memorandum is based on a national survey of 1000 registered voters. Telephone interviewing was conducted from March 1-6, 2002. The statistical margin of error for the voters sample as a whole is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error for subgroups is larger.*

Our recent poll shows that voters put a high priority on improving the public health system not just to deal with the threat of bioterrorism but also to prevent chronic disease more effectively. Voters overwhelmingly support increased funding and greater coordination in our public health system. Voters believe that that another biological or chemical terrorist attack is likely, and fear that their local public health system is unprepared to meet the challenge. Interestingly, while public concern about biological and chemical terrorism is high, concern about chronic disease is as high or higher, a further indication of the public's desire to improve the public health system to deal with both terrorist threats *and* chronic diseases like cancer and asthma.

### Voters Show Strong Support For Public Health Investments



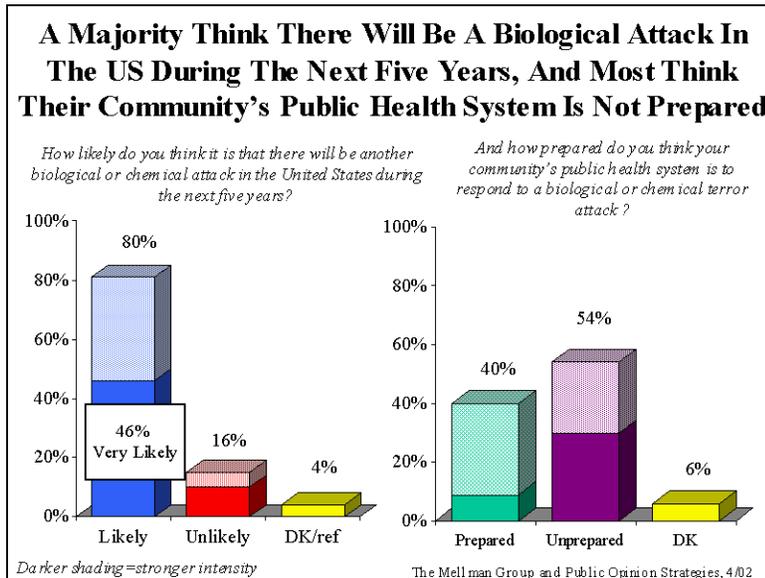
A strong majority of voters (66%) think the United States should spend more than it currently does on protecting public health, with 41% saying that the US should spend much more. This represents an increase from 1999, when 61% of voters felt that we should spend more on public health. Just 4% of voters believe that the US spends too much on public health (down from 7% in

1999), and 22% believe that we spend the right amount.

Support for increased spending on public health crosses gender, political, and geographic lines. Seventy percent (70%) of women support more spending on public health, and 62% of men (38% much more) agree. Majorities of Democrats (77%), independents (67%), and Republicans (55%) say that the US should spend more on public health. Additionally, this support crosses regional boundaries, with majorities in the Northeast (74%), the South (67%), the West (67%) and the Midwest (62%) agreeing that the US should increase spending on protecting public health.

### Voters Believe That Another Biological Or Chemical Terrorist Attack Against The US Is Likely, And Believe That Their Local Public Health System Is Unprepared To Respond

An overwhelming majority (80%) of Americans believe that another biological or chemical terrorist attack is likely in the US in the next five years, with almost half (46%) saying that such an attack is very likely. Just 16% think that it is unlikely that another biological attack is likely to occur.



The view cuts across traditional demographic lines. In fact, majorities of voters across every major demographic group believe that another biological or terrorist attack is likely to happen in the next five years. A slightly greater percentage of voters in the South (83%) say a terrorist attack is likely, but in general concern is fairly uniform throughout the country: 80% in the Midwest say an attack is likely, 79% say it is likely in the Northeast, and 79% likely in the West.

While Americans expect an attack, they worry that their community's public health system is not prepared to cope with this threat. A majority (54%) believes that their local public health system is unprepared, against 40% who feel that it is prepared. Just 9% of voters believe that their community's public health system is *very* well prepared to deal with such an attack. Concern about the preparedness of local public health systems is slightly higher among those who believe another terrorist attack is likely to happen. Fifty-six percent (56%) of those who think that another terrorist attack is likely believe that their community's public health system is unprepared to deal with it, compared to 38% of those voters who believe it is prepared. Voters in the Midwest are somewhat more likely to say that their community's public health system is prepared (48% unprepared, 45% prepared), than are voters in the South (56% unprepared, 40% prepared), the West (54% unprepared, 38% prepared), or the Northeast (56% unprepared, 37% prepared).

## Yet, Public Concern About Chronic Disease Is As High – Or Higher – Than Concern About Biological And Chemical Terrorism

Despite the expectation of a future biological or chemical attack, when it comes to their health, voters express more concern about certain chronic diseases. In fact, voters are most concerned about cancer, with 77% saying that it is one of the things that concerns them the most (41%) or a great deal (36%). Sixty-six percent (66%) express at least a “great deal” of concern about heart disease (33% “one of the most”). A majority of voters (60%) also express at least a great deal of concern about diseases caused by environmental factors like pollution (27% “one of the most”).

Concern about chemical terrorism, like the release of dangerous chemicals in the water system, is slightly lower on people’s list of health concerns, with 58% saying that it concerns them at least “a great deal” (34% one of the most). This is not to say that they are not concerned about biological and chemical terrorism. Instead, the key point is that chronic diseases like cancer, heart disease, and diseases caused by environmental factors remain at the top of voters’ list of health concerns even after September 11<sup>th</sup> and the anthrax attacks last year, and that voters would support increased spending in public health to deal with both terrorism and chronic diseases like asthma and cancer.

## Voters Would Like To See More Coordination In Our Public Health System

After hearing that there are more than 50 separate (federal) offices dealing with public health, but no single agency in charge of coordinating these offices, a majority of voters (57%) say that public health officials are *not* coordinated well enough to do their jobs properly, with just 33% saying there is sufficient coordination.

Moreover, when asked how important it is that a single agency be in charge of coordinating these public health efforts, voters are nearly unanimous in saying that it is important (93% important, 67% *very* important). Just 6% of voters say that it is not important to have a single agency in charge of coordination.

