

# commentary

from other pens...

## High rating is clout for anti-terror effort

By Will Lester

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Thrust into the role of wartime leader, President Bush has soared in the polls to a 90 percent approval rating.

The political muscle that comes with the numbers gives him a strong hand to lead the campaign against terrorism and try to help the economy.

Democrats caution the clout doesn't automatically transfer to partisan political positions on unrelated domestic issues. Leaders from both parties say they expect the administration to try to keep a bipartisan tone on most issues while carrying out the anti-terror battle.

"He's getting a lot of credit for not passing partisan stuff through the Congress," said Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, a Democrat. "He's done a fine job of knowing he should try to get along with Democrats. His approval would be 50 percent really fast if he were to use this for partisan political purposes."

Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt, a Republican, said: "The most profound thing that's happened is he's become America's president instead of the American president. When it comes to matters related to war, the political clout is unending."

After the terrorist attacks Sept. 11, Congress quickly passed a \$15 billion relief package for the airline industry, a \$40 billion package to repair the terrorism damage and bolster security and are wrapping up details on an anti-terror bill that would give law enforcement new powers to search out terrorists.

Other measures have stalled, including an aviation security bill with a proposal to make airport screeners federal employees and a foreign aid bill held up in the Senate in a dispute over judicial appointments. Administration priorities causing spirited debates are an economic stimulus package with a heavy emphasis on tax cuts, energy legislation and a trade promotion bill.

The president's father had equally high poll ratings a decade ago after the Persian Gulf War, but those numbers evaporated within a year as the economy slumped and he was maneuvered into a tax increase that eroded his Republican base.

Rep. Mark Foley, R-Fla., said Bush "appears to have learned from his father's mistakes. I always felt if George Bush One had used that groundswell of support from the Persian Gulf War, he could have done some phenomenal things for the country. He seemed to rest on the laurels of Desert Storm, and the public was expecting so much more."

Leaders from both parties said the president's high ratings are closely linked to the approach he's governed with in the weeks after the attacks.

"He's doing what he did in Texas," said Arizona Gov. Jane Hull, a Republican. "He's reaching the ability to sit down with Republicans and Democrats. It's a shame it takes a tragedy to create that spirit. The American people like bipartisanship."

Inevitably, lawmakers from both sides will promote legislation that had bogged down a sharply divided Congress before the attacks. Some Republicans suggest Democrats are in a weaker position now.

"The president has the overwhelming support and confidence of the American people right now," said Rep. J.C. Watts of Oklahoma, chairman of the House Republican Conference. "I think Democrats will realize it is not the time to obstruct."

Democratic Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state scoffed at the notion that Democrats will be afraid to oppose the administration on divisive domestic issues.

"I do think he's got considerable political clout when it comes to issues of national security," said Murray, who heads the committee responsible for electing Democrats to the Senate. "But if he were to try and take that and run with a proposal that has divided the country in the past, like privatizing Social Security, I don't think anybody would be hesitant to oppose him."

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — Will Lester covers politics and polling for The Associated Press.



## Fear of Anthrax seems to be generational

WASHINGTON — For some reason, this Anthrax scare is tougher on the younger people. It's the people in their 20s who fret the most loudly. They wait to be tested. They want their Cipro. They want people like me to stop our "denial" and get with the program.

They also want people like TV news anchor Tom Brokaw and U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D., to wise up. It's a generational thing, and I have my suspicions why.

One theory is that we older people have been through worse. Some men still hide jars of quarters in the basement for fear of another Great Depression. World War II and Korea took men from the classrooms and threw them into battle. The early Cold War had us kids huddled under our desks waiting for the big "flash" that meant the beginning of World War III and the end of the world.

Then came the terror of Vietnam. That conflict cost us 10 times the deaths of the World Trade Center. Some went willingly and courageously. Some were grabbed and found the courage for the fight. Some just sweated it out back home. You think Anthrax is bad? You should have seen the draft.

My second suspicion is more subtle. It has to do with freedoms lost over the past few decades.

When I came to this city 30 years ago last spring, you could walk right into the office of any senator



chris matthews

● commentary

or member of Congress. You could go anywhere you wanted in the U.S. Capitol at any time of day. There were no metal detectors, no ID cards to show — nothing. The right to petition Congress was as literal as the Constitution. If you wanted to pester some politician, you went ahead and did it.

The same was true of the president. The 33 bus from the Friendship Heights area of Washington, D.C., drove right in front of the White House on the way to Capitol Hill. When Nixon got into trouble, a driver could honk his horn as he passed 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, and the occupant upstairs knew it meant, "Resign!"

All this is gone. Checkpoints and tiger teeth guard the Capitol plaza where Roosevelt said we have nothing to fear but fear itself. You can't bring a truck anywhere near the Hill. Pennsylvania Avenue is closed to traffic from 15th Street to 17th Street.

Even airline passengers are restricted while flying. If anyone leaves his seat during the 30-minute

approach to Reagan National airport, the plane heads directly for Dulles.

Want to write your senator? Forget it. That letter postmarked Trenton, N.J., and addressed to Tom Daschle, closed down the mailroom.

It took years for this shutting of the democratic gates. First came that bombing in the Capitol in '71. Then came Oklahoma City. Then, Sept. 11 and the fourth plane, which was brought down by courageous passengers, and which people figure was headed for the Capitol.

This thing called "terrorism" has wormed its way inside. Anthrax spores are in the Senate mail. Little particles of hell are in the Capitol air. Staffers with nervous systems once wired to the news cycle now wait in line for Cipro. The big questions of foreign policy and fiscal policy have shrunk to the small one: How do I stay alive?

"We have some planes," we hear the hijacker's voice. "Just stay quiet and you'll be okay ... Nobody move please ... Don't try to make any stupid moves."

We older people refuse to buy it. Maybe it's because we've been through worse. But maybe it's because we've been through better.

Chris Matthews, a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, is host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels. The 1999 edition of "Hardball" was published by Touchstone Books.

## Travel writers enjoy High Plains Museum

To the Editor:

The first week of October a group of travel writers traveled the state of Kansas. While they were in Goodland they were guests of the Sherman County Convention and Visitor's Bureau and stayed at the Comfort Inn.

We received this letter from one of the guests. It shows how proud we should be of our museum, Linda Holton and all the people who work there. Out of the places they visited within the state, one of the highlights was our museum.

I just wanted to pass this on.

Judy Siruta  
Goodland Comfort Inn

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Greetings from California.

I'm busy beginning to assemble my baroque collection of Kansas references.

What an incredible trip. There was for more than any of us imagined seeing and enjoying in your hospitable state.

It was a disappointment we couldn't spend more time at the High Plains Museum where the unique past-to-present Goodland and Sherman County history is so well presented. I express this as a former museum docent (volunteer) and visitor to many museums across the globe.

The dioramas and full sized exhibits, not the least of which was the automated replica of the first patented helicopter in America, were thorough and sensitive. The took those of us who remember days of yesteryear back to simple, less complicated, yet challenging, earlier times.

You may be interested that at dinner on Friday, one of our hosts asked what we'd seen and enjoyed during our I-70 sweep through Kansas (and back). The most mentioned was the High Plains Museum.

Not only has the museum been well assembled, but it was personally communicated by the fondest, warmest hospitality one could imagine. Our too-short time there will warm our hearts and memories as we reflect over days and months



from our readers

● to the editor

ahead. I, for one, look forward to sharing the heartland with readers.

Thank you and all who participated, for your thoughtfulness and hard work. You certainly brought the "real Kansas" of Goodland and Sherman County to us, and we're grateful.

Sandra Lee Larsen  
Dana Point, Calif.  
www.travelwriters.com/sandralee

To the Editor:

I doubt my words will have any effect on our community (it seems nobody can say anything to change things for the better) but, somebody has to stand up for what's right.

After I read the article in our local newspaper about "Rowdy kids run stadium," I thought to myself, "What is our community coming to? Where are the parents?"

The paper article said the parents are "harassing" the principals for doing their job.

The article talked about how "... one of the principals tried to break up a football game (he was doing his job) ... , but was accosted by a parent, ..."

I thought good grief! How can this be?

Teaching is a hard, seriously underpaid, job made even more difficult by parents who complain about the small amount of taxes they pay for education, as-well-as, how bad things are in schools these days, but don't really want to put in the effort to do anything but complain.

I know there are parents who do help, but so few do. Kudos to you who care enough to get involved. Even if that man who "grabbed him by the shirt and

told him (the principal) to give it back," apologized later, the damage was done to those very young, very impressionable minds.

When my wife and I first moved here, we were told this was a very conservative community.

I thought to myself, again, "I am a fish out of water." I have to ask, "Is this rowdy behavior coming from these conservative homes? Are conservative parents divorced from what should be taught to children?"

I know that most parents know better (whether they are conservative or not). The boys who saw that, and especially the son of that man, I wondered, what are they thinking? Maybe he thought, "Wow! Look at what my dad did, that guy will never push me around again."

That principal was doing his job, and if the parents of those rowdy boys were doing their job, there wouldn't be any of this rough housing where it shouldn't be.

Parenting can be hard work, but the rewards can be priceless. This "rowdy" behavior from these runaway students can be stopped, but it has to come from mom and dad. They are the ones who are supposed to teach right from wrong.

What are they teaching?

Ronald Asbury  
Goodland

## berry's world



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