

# commentary

from other pens...

## Need to trust leaders drives shift in opinion

By Will Lester

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Americans’ trust in government has increased to levels not seen in more than three decades, driven by both the September terrorist attacks and the Bush administration’s response.

Overall trust in government and institutions has been at the root of many dramatic changes in public opinion. Approval has increased for Congress, the United Nations and the news business.

Pollsters, historians and social scientists are watching to see if the increased trust in institutions that came after the terrorist attacks will be long-term, like some public opinion shifts during earlier wars, or will fade. The monitors of public sentiment tend to agree the length of positive feelings about government is related to the duration of security threats and the government’s performance.

“This is a watershed event resulting in a true shift in public opinion,” said John Robinson, a sociologist at the University of Maryland who helps direct the General Social Survey, a leading national measure of public opinion. “On the question of trust in government, I think this is ... more likely to be a long-term change.”

The number of Americans who think government can be trusted to do what is right most of the time has risen to six in 10, according to a Gallup poll. That’s a level not seen since the 1960s, before Vietnam, civil unrest and the Watergate scandal set off an erosion of trust.

By 1980, only 25 percent of the public felt government could be trusted most of the time, and by 1994, only 17 percent felt that way. By the late 1990s, the number had rebounded to about 40 percent.

Those who closely monitor public opinion caution such attitudes can ebb or flow, depending on the progress of the war on terrorism and the economy. But they also said the terror threat may have changed something fundamental about how the government is perceived.

Earlier wars caused long-term shifts in public opinion, most notably World War II, when Americans grew more comfortable with the idea of women in the workplace and a peacetime draft. They shifted from an isolationist view of the world to widespread acceptance that the United States has an international role, said Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

“Attitudes on things directly related to terrorism or the government, anything related to the government or government leaders has changed significantly,” said Frank Newport, executive editor of the Gallup Poll. “The question is whether this is a real realignment or a temporary shift.”

The increased trust probably will last as long as the country needs to keep its focus on national security, Newport said.

“Right now, people have to trust the government,” he said. “It’s the only entity that can provide security.”

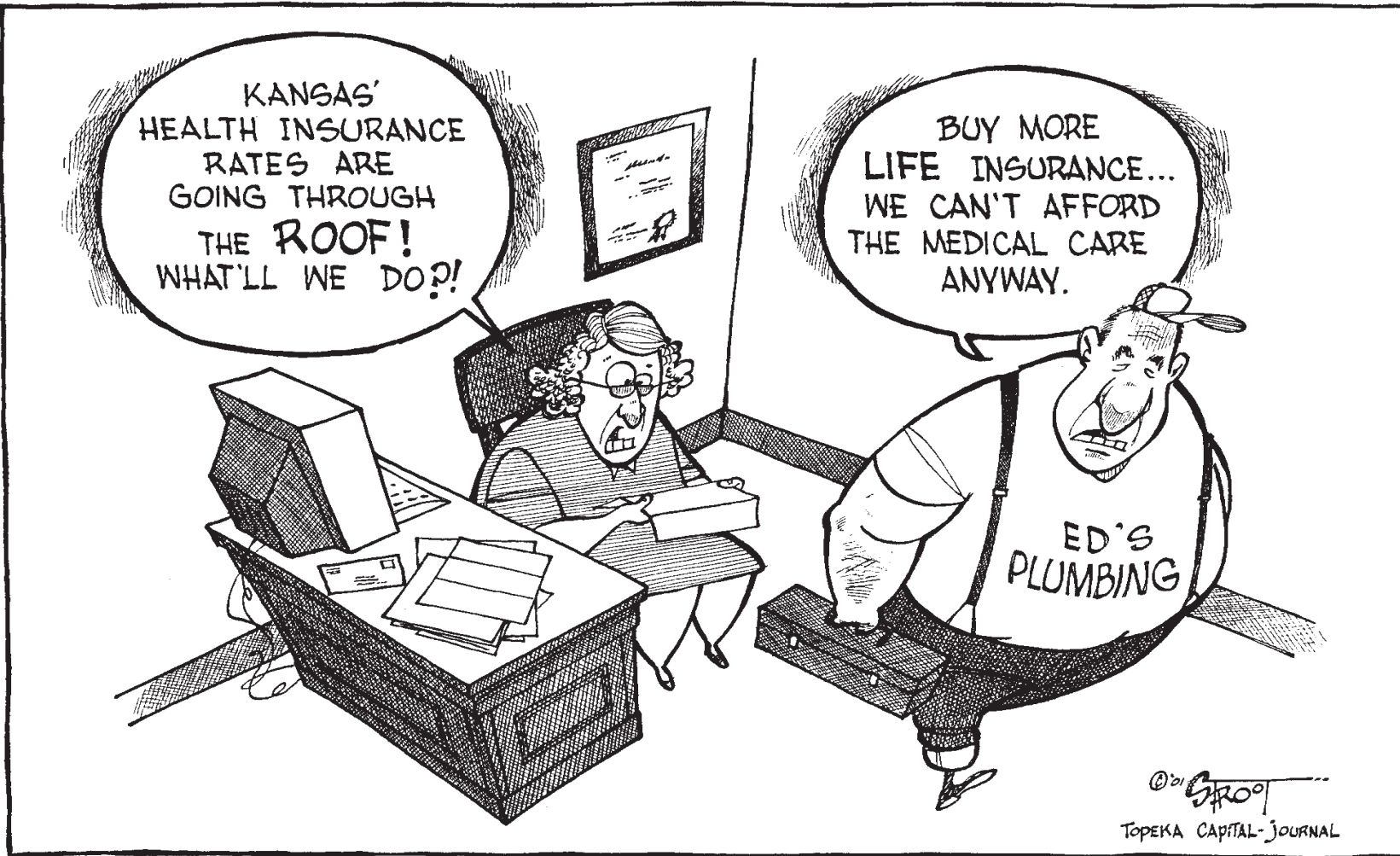
The attacks increased public sentiment for the U.S. to stay engaged in world affairs to an overwhelming majority. Once the immediate threat is dealt with, that number is likely to slip back to the pre-attack levels of about 60 percent who felt that way, said Steven Kull, director of the University of Maryland’s Program on International Policy Attitudes.

“The increase in the trust of government cannot be extended beyond the government’s response to these security concerns,” said Stephen Wayne, a professor of government at Georgetown University. “I don’t think the people trust the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the IRS or the Social Security Administration any more than they did.”

The trust in government may be tempered as “Congress gets back to a more combative role,” said Karlyn Bowman, polling analyst at the American Enterprise Institute.

That high level of trust probably includes a degree of wishful thinking. “There is a very thin line,” sociologist Robinson said, “between the trust people have of government in this national security crisis and the hope they have that government will succeed.”

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



## War with Iraq — tempting, but bad idea

WASHINGTON — Like other victors before him, President Bush is being tempted with greater glories. He should follow his triumph in Afghanistan, the trumpet sounds, with a more magnificent destruction of Saddam Hussein.

If it were in my power to stop him, I would. To attack Iraq now would forfeit all that the American president has won since Sept. 11:

- the backing of the United Nations;
- the resurrection of the Big Three alliance of America, Britain and Russia, which won World War II;
- the support of the Arab League; and
- a 90-percent job approval from the American people.

It short, it would be nothing like the recent successes in Afghanistan.

To topple Saddam would take a half million to a million U.S. troops. It would require an occupying force capable of policing a civilian population that would be embittered by enormous casualties and a brutal bombing campaign. Throughout much of the world, and not just in the Middle East, it would cast our side in the role of the aggressor. Once again, it would recall Pearl Harbor, but this time with us in the role of the imperial Japanese.

I have given up trying to understand the thinking of those who agitate for such a wrong and tragic course against Saddam. They try and fail to blame him for Sept. 11. They try and fail to blame him for the anthrax letters. Yet, their inability to nail him only adds to their resolve.

They want nothing less than an all-out war with Iraq. They want American troops to march into Baghdad, take control of the country, “take out” Saddam, and create a post-Saddam government favorable to the United States.



chris matthews

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I can’t tell where President Bush stands, whether with his Secretary of State Colin Powell or with the neo-conservatives inside and outside of his administration who have long led their global wish-list with Saddam’s destruction. He called this week for Saddam to let U.N. Inspectors search his country for weapons of mass destruction. While Hussein defied him, this is the sort of posturing that’s been going on for years.

Bush must certainly know the risks and costs of the all-out invasion the anti-Hussein hawks are demanding. It would put the United States on one side, Iraq and the rest of the world on the other. I doubt that even Tony Blair would back an attack on Baghdad.

What a calamitous end this would bring to the current antiterrorist campaign. Instead of leading the world in a war of justice, we would be undoubtedly scorned as an aggressor.

Here at home, the country would suffer a hard division.

The hunt for Osama bin Laden was, let’s face it, an easy sell. His crowd killed our people. For that, he’s going to die.

A war with Iraq would enjoy none of this same authenticity. We would be attacking another country based on what it might do: use biological or nuclear weapons against another country.

That might work with a small group of us. It will

not sell to the majority.

I liked the way Harry Truman talked about us. He called us “this country.” He didn’t mean the government in Washington, but the American people in those splendid moments when we feel and act as one.

Right now is one of those moments. The Taliban is finished. Forces allied with the United States have grabbed Kabul and other major cities, while the Marines hunt cave-to-cave for Osama bin Laden.

Here at home, the country stands united. The terrorist network that attacked us on Sept. 11 is being decapitated.

Best of all, we can see a feasible future line of attack. To wipe out bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda network, America will now attack its other training grounds in Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and the Philippines. And along every step of the way, President Bush will retain the emphatic loyalty of the American people. That 90-percent job approval rating will stay at 90 percent.

This isn’t complicated. Bush is doing what any red-blooded American leader would do. He is bringing justice to those who killed our people in cold blood.

That’s something Americans have been ready to do since those early Revolutionary days, when our flag showed a coiled snake and the words “Don’t Tread on Me.”

What we shouldn’t be ready to do is attack another country before it attacks us.

Chris Matthews, author of “Now, Let Me Tell You What I Really Think” (Free Press, 2001) and “Hardball” (Touchstone Books, 1999), is a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle and the host of “Hardball” on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels.

## Debate over Blue Cross deal center on care issues

TOPEKA (AP) — An Indianapolis company is trying to acquire the dominant health insurer in Kansas, and the key issue is how much consumers will notice after the deal is consummated.

Officials of Anthem Insurance Companies Inc. say that the people who depend upon Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Kansas to cover their medical expenses will see a name change and receive a new card to carry but won’t see any significant differences.

But Kansas doctors, hospitals and nurses, as well as an advocacy group for poor and working class families are nervous about the conversion of a Kansas company owned by its policyholders into a branch of an out-of-state firm with stockholders.

Anthem needs the approval of Insurance Commissioner Kathleen Sebelius to acquire the Kansas Blues. She has scheduled five public hearings, starting Tuesday in Hays, and an administrative hearing for Jan. 7-9 in Topeka. She expects to rule in February.

“It’s incredibly important for the future of health insurance in the state,” Sebelius said. “My interest, frankly, is that we have a viable, solvent, responsive health insurance entity down the road.”

Anthem operates former Blue Cross plans in eight states: Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Nevada, New Hampshire and Ohio. It covers about 7.8 million people.

Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Kansas is by far the largest health insurer in the state, with 45 percent of the market. It has 172,000 group and individual policies that cover 400,000 people, and another 315,000 people who work for employers who self-insure but have their plans administered by the Blues.

The Kansas Blues feel vulnerable in a competitive industry with national players like Aetna and United HealthCare.

As a mutual company, policyholders are the only source of capital for the Kansas Blues, which also cannot reach beyond its territory — all Kansas except Johnson and Wyandotte counties.

“It’s a model you could easily say has outlived its usefulness in a modern business environment,” said Anthem spokesman Richard Cockrum.

Both Cockrum and Kansas Blues spokesman Graham Bailey said that if the acquisition does not occur, market forces could put the Kansas Blues in financial trouble. Bailey said the acquisition would permit Anthem to spread insurance risks



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from Kansas across a larger pool of policyholders.

“We just need to be bigger,” Bailey said. “We need to have access to capital. We have to be able to take advantage of economies of scale.”

Still, some Kansans are concerned. The Kansas Medical Society, the Kansas Hospital Association, the Kansas State Nurses Association and the Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved have intervened in the proceedings before Sebelius.

Jerry Slaughter, the Kansas Medical Society’s executive director, said he does not know why the acquisition would create more market opportunities in Kansas for the former Blues because, “They already have the market.”

Joyce Volmuth, executive director of the Association for the Medically Underserved, said the Kansas Blues and Anthem are making the same arguments made to justify mergers and consolidation in other industries.

Volmuth said her group wants to make sure the number of uninsured Kansans doesn’t grow and that the disparity between services available to wealthy and poor Kansans doesn’t grow.

“That’s kind of a universal argument of business, that bigger is better,” Volmuth said. “That’s hard for me to buy.”

Cockrum said Anthem has a strong record of service in the states in which it operates former Blues health plans. In documents filed with Sebelius, the company said some of its programs have received national recognition.

“There’s a track record in this company of growing the business,” Cockrum said. “You grow the business by offering a good product at a good price.”

But the Medical Society isn’t so sure Anthem’s record is as strong as the company says it is. In its petition to intervene, the society cited lawsuits in Connecticut, an examination of complaints from consumers in Kentucky and conditions on acquisitions imposed by regulators in Maine and New Hampshire.

In its response, Anthem suggested the Medical

Society wanted to intervene “for no other reason than to unfairly impugn the reputation of Anthem.”

Slaughter said the society, which represents 4,500 doctors, also wants to make sure that Anthem has a licensed physician as its medical director and gives doctors a chance to influence medical policy.

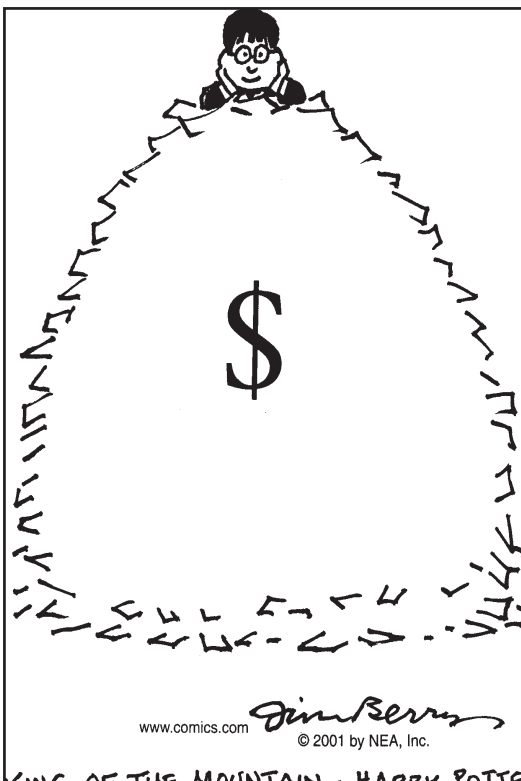
“Blue Cross has been around for 60 years, and it’s well known among providers and patients,” Slaughter said. “They have always welcomed input from physicians on clinical issues.”

But Cockrum and Bailey said Anthem and the Blues have told the society repeatedly that a physician would continue to be medical director. Both also said Kansas policyholders shouldn’t notice any changes in their coverage.

Sebelius is left to sort through the evidence and evaluate the conflicting opinions. She has been careful to say that she has reached no conclusions, only that she wants consumers to participate in the hearings on the acquisition.

“Too often, consumers are on the sidelines when big decisions are made,” she said.

## berry’s world



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N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services ([nbetz@nwkansas.com](mailto:nbetz@nwkansas.com))  
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. ([support@nwkansas.com](mailto:support@nwkansas.com))

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