commentary

from other pens...

Attitudes have shifted about national leadership

The public's attitude toward government and the importance of national leadership took a big positive swing after Sept. 11, and six months later those changes appear to be long-term.

Americans' feelings about their own well-being have very nearly returned to normal, and political attitudes are starting to return to more predictable patterns.

"The most striking change is the new relevance of the nation," said Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. "The public needs the federal government in a way it hasn't needed the federal government in a very long time."

Kohut said the attacks changed public opinion more than any event since World War II. He noted that in the 2000 campaign, a third of voters said it wasn't important who was elected president.

'The Sept. 11 attacks stopped those sentiments dead in their tracks," Kohut wrote in an analysis of public opinion six months after the attacks.

President Bush has been the major beneficiary of this newfound faith in leadership, especially after the early months of the war on terrorism generally went well. Six months later, Bush's job approval rating remains in the high 70s and low 80s. Within seven months after the Persian Gulf War started in early 1991, his father's stratospheric job approval ratings started to slide back below 70 percent.

Pollsters have found Bush's strength somewhat phenomenal but expect the law of gravity eventually to take over. Kohut noted more than six in 10 Democrats approved of Bush's job performance in a recent poll. "That can only go on so long, barring any more craziness," he said.

General trust in institutions, including Congress, went up across the board, but an ABC News poll early this year suggested the public's new faith in government was mostly related to national security and the war on terrorism, not increased faith in government to handle domestic issues such as the economy, health care and education.

The number of people who said they trust government to do what is right most of the time doubled to almost six in 10 soon after the attacks and remains at about half now. The new trust in government has played to Republicans' benefit since the attacks. Tough congressional fights over energy, taxes and the deficit could bring a more partisan response, pollsters suggest.

The number of people who want the United States to take a leading role in international affairs increased significantly after the attacks. As recently as February, three-fourths of respondents said in a Gallup poll the United States should take a leading or major role in world affairs.

The increased interest in international engagement has gone up, paired with public interest in the United States working closely with allies, said Steven Kull, who monitors public opinion as director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland.

"Support for the war on terrorism is extremely strong and unflagging," he said. He cautions, however, that support drops quickly when people are asked about taking future military action without support of allies.

On a more personal level, the attacks caused an increase of emotional symptoms such as crying, insomnia, nervousness and upset stomach. Those symptoms receded through the end of last year and are disappearing now, said Tom Smith, director of the General Social Survey.

"The idea that everything changed hasn't been borne out," Smith said. "There has been no change in the support for capital punishment, no change in the support for gun control. Some predicted a greater dislike of Arabs and Muslims, but survey data did not back them up."

"Often you don't see someone's job approval hold up for this long," said Karlyn Bowman, a polling analyst at the American Enterprise Institute. The president's strong standing, she said, is probably linked to

the early successes in the war. "All bets would be off if something else like the Sept. 11 attacks hap-

pened," Bowman said. "I don't know who they would blame. EDITOR'S NOTE — Will Lester covers politics and polling for The Associated Press.

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Important work of session begins this week

TOPEKA — Legislators now face the hard choices.

How many teachers will lose their jobs? How many first-graders will be crammed into a single

How many elderly Kansans won't get hot meals during the week? Will more parents of disabled children have to quit work to stay home with their youngsters? Will the courts be closed on some week days?

Legislators have been waiting for new revenue estimates before starting meaningful discussions on the budget to finance state government after July 1. They received those numbers Friday.

Most bills, lawmakers can ignore, and state government will go on. But they're not done with their work until the last appropriations bill passes—and the next budget balances.

"We have to have a budget by July 1, or everything shuts down," said Rep. Melvin Minor, D-Stafford, a member of the House Appropriations

Legislators began the year facing a \$426 million gap between expected revenues and spending required by state and federal law. Creating much of the hole were promises that legislators made when times were good to finance highway projects and provide more money for higher education.

But with more pessimistic revenue estimates, the gap has grown to \$675 million, so legislators don't face merely a choice of raising taxes or breaking important promises.

They must decide whether to increase taxes even though the state's economy is slumping and some families are suffering financially — or to cut

Most legislative leaders believe the solution will be a painful combination of the two.

Kansans directly.



ap news analysis

If aid for education is cut, some public schools are likely to reduce their teaching staffs and have larger classes. Universities are likely to scale back their course offerings.

Social services present a special problem, because the cost of providing services for the needy is rising, and some services are mandated by federal law.

When the session began, Gov. Bill Graves submitted a proposed budget that assumed no new revenues and reduced aid to education, cut social services, closed minimum-security prisons and canceled highway projects.

Now, legislators may need to increase taxes just to prevent the budget from being worse than Graves' austere proposal — labeled unacceptable by many lawmakers. 'We're going to have to have help from addi-

tional tax revenues to get out of this," said Senate Ways and Means Committee Chairman Steve Morris, R-Hugoton. "None of us wants to raise taxes, but we have no choice this year." The House plans to begin its discussions with

what Speaker Kent Glasscock has called "buildyour-own-salad week."

Throughout the week, the House plans to debate proposals for increasing taxes.

Next week, the Appropriations Committee will begin fashioning a budget based on what — if anything — passes.

Glasscock, R-Manhattan, said he expects the to protect us if we fail to do the job." Each number on paper represents a policy deci- House to have to repeat the whole process at least sion, and many decisions will affect individual—once because many members need to see the worst—has covered state government and the budget since possible budget to accept the idea of increasing 1987.

taxes in an election year.

Minor said: "I don't have any doubt that these tax measures, at this time, will be defeated. I think the idea is that once everybody sees how serious the cuts have to be, maybe there will be some change of

Minor defends Glasscock's approach, saying "The speaker has to do something," but Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, D-Topeka thinks the result will be a "three-ring circus." Senate President Dave Kerr decided to appoint a

special committee—a "working group"—to draw the outlines of a budget and draft tax proposals. Legislators haven't started the serious discus-

sions earlier partly because they've been consumed with redrawing legislative and congressional districts to reflect shifts in population over the pas

But they've also been waiting for the latest revenue estimates.

As they've waited, they've discussed issues like abortion, restricting telemarketers, a tougher child passenger safety law, making it more difficult for some couples to obtain a divorce and even discouraging unwanted e-mail "spam."

None of those issues drives the session. Even redistricting, a constitutionally mandated duty, can be dumped on state and federal courts in extreme circumstances.

But the Kansas Constitution says that the only way any government agency can spend any money is "in pursuance of a specific appropriation made by law," something only the Legislature can pro-

That makes every other issue, as Glasscock puts it, "a precursor to the budget."

Hensley said: "There is no safety net or backup EDITOR'S NOTE: Correspondent John Hanna

This week is called 'taxfest 2002'

The week beginning March 11th is still not expected to be a very busy week in the Legislature. We cease committee meetings (except for Fed and State, Appropriations and Tax committees) March 26th leaving only 12 meeting days for regular committees. The session is coming to an end and we have not really started to work on our primary responsibility - the budget. This week we will be "tax week" in the House.

This week has been called "taxfest 2002" by some. Monday will be devoted to discussing increases in income taxes, Tuesday is inheritance and property taxes, Wednesday sales taxes and Thursday is for sin taxes (gambling, alcohol etc.). The purpose is to find out which members really wish to raise any taxes to help with the \$675 million

The Consensus Revenues Estimating Group met March 8, 2002 to revise the estimates for FY 2002. The revised estimate for the current fiscal year is 4.7 percent below receipts of last year. The news will worsen when Social and Rehabilitation Services caseload estimates and Department of Aging entitlement programs are recalculated this week. I am led to believe this is the worst shortfall in the history of Kansas. Things could be considerably worse and I am certain the Kansas economy will improve

The Senate has appointed a nine member committee to do the same thing but also will be able to discuss other methods of balancing the budget. The Senate may also be meeting in evenings and on the weekend to complete their discussions before bringing the information to the full Senate. Our own Senator Clark is one of those members.

LOCAL CONTROL OF FUNDS TO SCHOOL

House Assistant Majority Leader John Ballou, R-Gardner, announced last week that he will introduce legislation which would allow school districts the ability to release their unencumbered state monies from specific accounts to be used in the school district's general fund. Kansas schools have over \$432 million in unencumbered money in their local district funds.

As explained by the Kansas Department of Education, some of the school district funds are allowed carry over each year and other funds must be used. Each school district fund has specific purposes which many times limit the use of the



jim morrison

capitol review

money by the school district.

The measure is being drafted to allow Kansas schools to use money from their local school district reserve funds during the current budget shortfalls. The intent is to allow school districts to use these state monies they already have to fill holes in their budget. I would like to hear from my area schools on this issue so please contact me as soon

REGENTS RESEARCH BILL

Last week, the House passed and I voted against the University Research and Development Enhancement Act. The legislation would give the Kansas Board of Regents the ability to make and execute contracts for the construction, operation, and management of scientific research and development facilities. In addition, the legislation would authorize the Board of Regents to issue bonds through the Kansas Development Finance Authority. The finance authority would be authorized to issue bonds for not more than \$110.0 million on behalf of the Board of Regents.

The Board would be authorized to form one subsidiary corporation to perform or to assist the Board of Regents in the performance of its powers, duties, and functions related to scientific research and development facilities. The ultimate cost to Kansas Taxpayers was not fully considered and constitutes a considerable commitment that we likely cannot fund at this time. It also would rob funds from the Economic Development Initiative Fund to pay for the program. That is why I voted no. Under this bill, the state will be responsible for

debt service payments on the bonds. These payments are limited to not more than \$10.0 million per year and not more than \$50.0 million in total. Debt service is scheduled to begin in FY 2004 and would continue for five years.

During debate on the House floor, two amendments were added to the committee bill. First, the House amended the bill with a funding mechanism that would require Economic Development Initia-

tive Fund monies to be used for the debt service payments.

The House also added a new section to the bill. New Section 11 of HB 2960 would require all employees of contractors and subcontractors, who are awarded contracts with the state, to be paid a prevailing wage. Prevailing wage is defined as a wage that is not less than the hourly wages, including fringe benefits, paid to corresponding classes of laborers and mechanics employed on similar projects in the county where the project is to be

If passed by the legislature, the measure would assist with four research and development projects: a Food Safety and Security Research Facility at Kansas State University, a Biomedical Research Facility at the University Of Kansas Medical Center, expansion of the Aviation Engineering Complex at Wichita State University and equipping the Biosciences Research Building at the University of

The legislation would expand research and development infrastructure at state universities. Expanded facilities serve as an incentive for federal grants. Supporters of the bill believe it is primarily an economic development initiative with an emphasis on developing and safeguarding major sectors of the Kansas economy. The House approved the measure and sent it on to the Senate for consider-

It appears this will be a long session. Please contact me with your concerns, thoughts, ideas and suggestions as to how to proceed. I truly appreciate your confidence in me and will continue to work hard to earn your ongoing trust as your representa-

Representative Jim Morrison, Kansas Legislature <jmorriso@ink.org>.

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