

## **POLL: AMERICANS SEE "LEADERSHIP GAP" ON SOLUTIONS FOR HEALTH CARE, SCHOOLS AND ENVIRONMENT**

*Bush, Clinton Get Low Scores as "Problem Solvers" from a Public Eager for Leadership; "Results for America" Initiative is Non-Partisan Push to Bust Up Political Logjam.*

**NEWTON, MA.—October 16, 2003**

It's official: Americans think that the politicians of both parties are not getting the job done. Fewer than one in 10 (9 percent) Americans view President George W. Bush as the "best problem solver" among six modern presidents, while more than a third (37 percent) separately identified former President Bill Clinton as the "worst problem solver" in the same group of presidents,<sup>1</sup> according to a new national opinion poll conducted by Opinion Research Corporation (ORC) International on behalf of "Results for America" (RFA) of the Civil Society Institute. Results for America ([www.resultsforamerica.org](http://www.resultsforamerica.org)) is encouraging a return to practical problem solving in political leadership during 2004 and beyond.

The RFA survey findings of a "leadership gap" show that more than half of Americans (55 percent) think the United States is either going in the wrong direction or has no direction at all. The RFA survey also concludes that majorities of Americans believe that current political leaders are either "very" or "somewhat weak" when it comes to "practical, problem-solving solutions" in three of four key issue areas: access to affordable health care insurance and medicine (73 percent); improving the quality of education for America's children (59 percent); and clean air and water and developing clean, safe energy resources (57 percent). Only in the fourth tested area—foreign policy/countering threats to our security—do a majority (59 percent) feel that practical leadership is strong. However, a still substantial 39 percent of Americans perceive today's leaders as weak in terms of finding practical solutions in this important area.

Civil Society Institute President Pam Solo said: **"Americans want leaders, but they don't see many of them out there today. These survey findings bring into sharp relief the public's craving for plain, old-fashioned American problem solving. It's what we used to be so good at in this country, but it is a crucial skill that has been corroded by divisive partisan politics to such an extent that it now seems to be lost altogether at the national level. Our new effort, Results for America, seeks to remedy that problem by galvanizing the grassroots energy that already is out there and to amplify the public's voice so that we can get back to solving the problems of our country. The time for partisan gridlock is over."**

Hon. Pat Schroeder, chair, Civil Society Institute and former member of Congress said: **"These survey findings speak volumes about what needs to change in American life today. Leaders in the government, political parties, the media and world of pundits don't look at problems any more in the same way that everyone else in the country does. There is a real 'disconnect' here. Those in the business of electioneering focus on scoring political points at the expense of their opponents. But Americans want**

**their problems resolved and they just don't see that happening today. That is why there is a real and present need for a group like Results for America to focus on promoting a new problem-solving agenda into the national debate."**

Opinion Research Corporation International Senior Research Manager Wayne Russum: **"A bit more than one year before the 2004 presidential election will take place, the new survey results released today indicate that nearly all Americans want their presidents to be honest, straight-forward pragmatists who solve major problems. However, majorities of Americans also report that they are concerned about the country's direction and they see few signs of practical problem solving in the current political leadership."**

#### KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Other key survey highlights include:

- ***Qualities sought in a leader.*** In looking for a U.S. President, over 90 percent of American adults believe it is extremely or very important that the individual be "honest, straightforward and willing to take responsibility" (95 percent) and have the "ability to find practical solutions to major problems" (93 percent). More than four in five (81 percent) feel it is important that a President have the "willingness to rise above party politics, if necessary."
- ***Health care concerns are shared across the political spectrum.*** Public worries about weak political leadership on health care is by far the most bipartisan of the four key areas covered in the survey, with 57 percent of Republicans concurring with 63 percent of Independents who lean Republican and 80 percent or more of Independents, Independents who lean Democratic and Democrats. Even on education and the environment, a significant minority of Republicans (38 percent and 37 percent, respectively) agree with the majority of Democrats, and Independents who see weak leadership in these areas. On foreign policy, nearly half (47 percent) of Independents and majorities of Democrats (62 percent) and Democratic leaning Independents (55 percent) see a lack of practical leadership.
- ***Perceptions of recent U.S. Presidents as problem solvers.*** President George W. Bush does not fare well when Americans are asked to rate the best and worst problem solvers from a list of six recent Presidents. When asked to identify the "best problem solver," Bush was second to last, with only Dwight D. Eisenhower (7 percent) ranking lower. Top marks went to Franklin Delano Roosevelt (30 percent), JFK (16 percent), Ronald Reagan (19 percent), and Bill Clinton (13 percent). Even among Republicans, only 20 percent named the incumbent as the top problem-solver president, compared to 27 percent of Democrats who picked Bill Clinton. In a separate question, nearly three in 10 Americans (29 percent) see George W. Bush as the worst problem-solver as president. Only Bill Clinton, with 37 percent, was more likely than Bush to be chosen as the worst Presidential problem solver. FDR received the fewest negative votes (1 percent), followed by John F. Kennedy (3 percent); Dwight D. Eisenhower (6 percent); and Ronald Reagan (14 percent).

- ***Country on the wrong track.*** In light of the findings on leadership, it is perhaps not surprising that more than half of all Americans (55 percent) question the country's direction. Nearly one in four (22 percent) say the country is moving in the wrong direction, while another third agree that America "seems to be without direction today." Here, there is a fissure along party lines. Most Republicans (74 percent) state that America is moving in the right direction, compared to only 27 percent of Independents, 20 percent of Democrats and 11 percent of Democratic leaning Independents.

#### ABOUT RESULTS FOR AMERICA

Results for America seeks to shape and tap the tremendous amount of community-level knowledge, experience and innovative action that could solve America's problems in four key areas:

#### [GREAT KIDS, GREAT SCHOOLS, GREAT COMMUNITIES](#)

Results for America supports investing in public education, increasing parental and local community engagement and influence in schools and creating conditions that will lead to learning and success for every child.

#### [HEALTHY FAMILIES, HEALTHY ECONOMY, HEALTHY AMERICA](#)

Results for America supports affordable health care and prescription drugs-an issue of tremendous importance to every American. It also supports a commitment to biomedical technologies and breakthrough treatments and cures for life-threatening illnesses that affect tens of millions of people.

#### [CLEAN AIR, CLEAN ENERGY, BRIGHT FUTURE](#)

Results for America supports reducing our debilitating dependence on oil and fossil fuels and making sensible investments in sustainable energy sources. It also supports ending devastating environmental policies caused by current policies and creating a healthier, safer, more secure world.

#### [RATIONAL FOREIGN POLICY, A SAFER WORLD](#)

Results for America supports a rational foreign policy that works in concert with global organizations-not in opposition to them. It also supports restoring America to its place in the world community as a nation respected and admired rather than mistrusted and feared.

As one its first efforts, Results for America is joining The Every Child Matters Education Fund in holding a series of presidential primary candidate forums in New Hampshire on children's issues. Each candidate will spend a full hour on stage discussing topics critical to children, youth, and families, including child abuse prevention and treatment, pre-kindergarten education, K-12 education, after-school programs, child health, and economic security for families.

RFA is a project of the Civil Society Institute. The mission of the Civil Society Institute (CSI), based in Newton, Massachusetts, is to serve as *catalysts for change* by creating

problem-solving interactions among people, and between communities, government and business, that can help to improve society. Visit Civil Society Institute on the Web at [www.civilsocietyinstitute.org](http://www.civilsocietyinstitute.org).

#### ABOUT THE SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Results are based on telephone interviews conducted among a random sample of 1021 adults 18 years old and older (505 men and 516 women) living in private households in the continental United States. Interviewing was completed by ORC during the period of October 3-6, 2003. Completed interviews were weighted by four variables: age, sex, geographic region, and race, to ensure reliable and accurate representation of the total adult population. The margin of error at a 95 percent confidence level is plus or minus 3 percentage points for the sample of 1021. Smaller sub-groups will have larger error margins.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** [Click here](#) for full survey findings and a streaming audio replay of a related telenews event.

1 The cited statistics for President Bush and former President Clinton are drawn from two separate questions and should **not** be contrasted directly with each other. For more information about how the public rated six modern-era presidents as "best problem solver" and then separately as "worst problem solver," see the full RFA survey report at [www.resultsforamerica.org](http://www.resultsforamerica.org).