

Conservative Party records Major win

LONDON - John Major, endorsed by Margaret Thatcher as the politician closest to her heart, was elected by the Conservative Party on Tuesday night to succeed her as prime minister.

Major, 47, fell two votes short of winning a majority in voting among the 372 Conservative Party members of Parliament, but his two opponents quickly conceded defeat and the party confirmed Major as the winner.

Thatcher, ending 11 1/2 years in power, intended to submit her resignation to Queen Elizabeth II this morning, and Major would then be called to lead the government.

Major, the chancellor of the exchequer, emerged from his official residence at 11 Downing St. Thursday night smiling and holding hands with his wife, Norma. He had first accepted congratulations from Thatcher, who stepped in from the prime minister's official residence next door.

Major received 185 votes, two short of a majority. Former Defense Secretary Michael Heseltine received 131 and Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd

had 56. Hurd and Heseltine conceded within minutes, and party officials declared Major elected.

"It is a very exciting thing to become leader of the Conservative Party, and particularly exciting, I think, to follow one of the most remarkable leaders the Conservative Party has ever had," Major said.

"Our job now I think is quite clear. We are going to unite totally and absolutely, and we're going to win the next general election," said Major, who will be the youngest British prime minister in this century.

Thatcher said she resigned to let someone from the Cabinet stand against Heseltine. Major and Hurd both joined the race, but before the vote Thatcher's aides spread the word that she was backing Major.

"I am thrilled and delighted John Major is to succeed me as prime minister of this country," Thatcher said in a statement.

The son of a circus performer and at one time a welfare recipient, Major personifies the values of self-reliance and hard work that Thatcher had

preached to the nation. Heseltine, 57, who precipitated Thatcher's downfall, said Major's election "lays the basis for the unity of our party."

Hurd said the party needed to unite, and "John Major is the right leader for this task."

Opposition leaders derided Major's election as "Thatcherism with a different face." The Conservatives' main rivals, the socialist Labor Party, demanded a general election.

"John Major is a Thatcherette," said Labor Party leader Neil Kinnock. "It means that the policies that brought the poll tax, recession, heavy mortgages and rising unemployment will go on."

During his five-day campaign, Major had said he would review the "poll tax," an unpopular local tax brought in by Thatcher, but he gave no other hints of differing with her.

While adopting a gentler tone on the contentious issue of Britain's involvement in Europe, he shares her opposition to a single European currency and shares her belief in tight

Great Britain's New Prime Minister

Conservative Party legislators elected John Major Tuesday to succeed Margaret Thatcher as the country's leader.



Profile of John Major

Born: March 29, 1943, in Cheam

Education: High school drop-out at age 16

Family: Married Norma Johnson in 1970; they have a daughter, 19, and a son, 15.

Early career: Executive of Standard and Chartered Bank for 14 years.

Prior to his success in banking, Major worked as a laborer and spent eight months on welfare.

Political career: Elected to Parliament in 1979; appointed chief secretary to the treasury after the June 1987 general elections; chosen by Thatcher as foreign secretary in July 1989; named chancellor of the exchequer, the nation's top treasury official, in October 1989.

AP

restraint on government spending. However, he insisted over the weekend, "I am not running as 'Son of Thatcher.' I am running as myself, with my own priorities and my own programs."

U.S., Soviet Union set date of Iraqi withdrawal deadline

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The United States and the Soviet Union have fixed Jan. 15 as a deadline for Iraq to get out of Kuwait or face the possibility of a military strike to drive it out, diplomats said Tuesday.

Three Americans, waving Iraqi flags and criticizing their government, arrived in Jordan after being freed by Saddam Hussein.

The deadline for an Iraqi withdrawal had been the only sticking point in a draft U.N. Security Council resolution agreed upon by the five permanent members of the council. The measure is expected to be voted on by the full council on Thursday.

In a fresh sign that the Baghdad government is bracing for war, the Pentagon said Iraq is rapidly increasing its troop strength in Kuwait and southern Iraq. It said Iraq has 450,000 troops in the region, an increase of 20,000 over last week.

The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, meanwhile, questioned whether it is really in the "vital interest" of the United States to use military force to liberate Kuwait, the oil-rich emirate Iraq seized on Aug. 2.

The freed Americans, whose families had traveled to Iraq to plead with Saddam for their release, told reporters at the Amman airport that the Bush administration had ignored their plight.

"I was not released with help from my government," said John Stevenson of Panama City, Fla. "It was my family who did it."

The United States has demanded the unconditional release of all of the hundreds of foreigners held hostage in Iraq, and the State Department has discouraged private hostage-freeing missions.

Another freed American, Clyde Jesse of Buffalo Grove, Ill., suggested the United States should negotiate with Saddam.

"I believe it is time we started talking," he said.

The third freed American was Fred Harrington of Bellevue, Wash. Ten Britons and five Germans were released as well. The women in the British group carried flowers; the Americans waved the U.S. and Iraqi flags.

At the United Nations, the stage was set for a Security Council meeting on Thursday to consider the strongest measure yet against Iraq. The resolution calls on Iraq to release all foreign hostages, withdraw its troops and restore Kuwait's government by the first of the year.

Western diplomats speaking on condition of anonymity said Secretary of State James A. Baker III and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze had settled on Jan. 15 as the deadline for an Iraqi withdrawal. The diplomats said they had reached the agreement in the past 24 hours.

Senate Democrats ask questions about White House's Gulf policy

WASHINGTON - Senate Democrats on Tuesday challenged President Bush's Persian Gulf policy, questioning the immediate need for offensive military action to oust Iraqi forces from Kuwait and demanding a greater role in the crisis.

"The question is not whether military action is justified. It is," said Sen. Sam Nunn, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, which began several days of hearings on the gulf crisis. "The question is whether military action is wise at this time and in our own national interest."

The hearings were called in reaction to Bush's decision to send an additional 200,000 troops to the Gulf to provide an "offensive military option."

With the administration seeking U.N. approval for the use of force in the Gulf, some committee members said the president also must make the same request of Congress.

House Speaker Thomas Foley, in remarks to newly elected House Democrats, underscored the point.

"I would personally want to have some assurance from the administration that no action would be taken prior to this Congress meeting, or it would be necessary to think seriously about calling in the previous Congress," he said.

"The question is not whether military action is justified. It is. The question is whether military action is wise at this time and in our own national interest."

Nunn
Senate Armed Services
Committee Chairman

The opening day of the session also was marked by the conspicuous absence of the administration's top military officials — Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and Gen. Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The two will testify Monday morning.

Sen. Bob Kerrey, D-Neb., said the policy change to underline a U.S. attack capability undermines the nation's attempts to maintain international support for the sanctions "by declaring, through its own word and those of the imminent U.N. resolution, that our patience was almost spent."

Committee member Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., declared, "If ever there is a case for giving peace a chance, this is it."

Bush pledges better relations, makes trade deal with Mexico

MONTERREY, Mexico - President Bush said Tuesday the U.S. economic slowdown could make it harder to obtain a free trade pact with Mexico, but pledged to "write a new page in North American history" with his veto pen if necessary to stop protectionist bills.

Bush wrapped up a two-day state visit and talks with President Carlos Salinas de Gortari with new agreements on oil investment, border crossings and on educational exchanges.

In a joint statement issued shortly before the president headed home from this northern Mexico industrial city, Bush and Salinas proclaimed "excellent cooperation" between their governments and reiterated a mutual call for a free-trade agreement.

In a key agreement, the pair resolved a U.S.-Mexican disagreement over the question of whether Mexico's vast oil industry should be open to U.S. or other foreign investment. Salinas has insisted the state-run and subsidized oil industry be exempt from

the free-trade talks.

Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady told reporters here that the dispute has been eased by Mexico's agreement to allow an Export-Import Bank loan for drilling and supplying equipment in Mexican oil exploration.

Brady said "for the first time, the services of American companies will be welcome and sought after with regard to drilling and other supplies in the Mexican oil fields."

The two presidents also announced that both governments would work toward opening nine new border points-of-entry to ease congestion at crossing stations and to make it easier for both Americans and Mexicans to travel across each other's borders.

Roman Popadiuk, a White House spokesman, said "both the United States and Mexico favor having new and additional ports of entry between the two countries where feasible, and after study and approval, by both sides." He said specific sites for the nine new crossings had not been determined.

John Glenn, D-Ohio, said the administration has yet to make its case for military attack in the Gulf, arguing that the nation "cannot get into a war that is not fully understood and backed by the American people. We need more than sound-bite justification."

The panel heard from former CIA Director James Schlesinger, who testified that the United States believes it will take about a year for international sanctions against Iraq to take full effect.

Schlesinger told the panel that was "an official estimate." The one time CIA director and defense secretary did not indicate the basis for his statement.

"A year, to me, seems to be in the right ballpark," Schlesinger said, time enough "to drain off the cash that is now sustaining the smuggling operations that bring in food."

"His society is bleeding and it's going to get worse with the passage of time," Schlesinger said. But it may take somewhat longer for those difficulties to lead Saddam to change his mind and withdraw from Kuwait, he said.

Schlesinger said the United States must show tenacity and "we must be prepared to stay a year" in the desert of the Mideast.

Economists say recession's here

WASHINGTON - Three out of four of the nation's top business economists believe the United States has skidded into a recession, in part because of the rapid rise in oil prices following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

"Recession is here," the National Association of Business Economists said Tuesday in a report on its canvass of 51 professional forecasters.

The report reflects a sharp jump in pessimism among the economists, who just three months ago still felt the country could avoid an imminent downturn.

In a survey following the Iraqi invasion, only 45 percent of the forecasters said a recession either had begun or was imminent. Just a year ago, 62 percent of the forecasters predicted the economy would escape a recession through 1992.

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