

Candidates take tightening race to heartland

Clinton again battles 'buyer's remorse'

WASHINGTON — When it happened before, Bill Clinton said buyer's remorse was eroding his lead — but he made the sale anyhow.

Bush has been gaining but still trails in the public opinion polls he's called crazy, with weekend surveys giving Clinton leads that range from nearly 9 percentage points to as few as 3.

Those polls also show Ross Perot's independent support running in the teens, a share that almost certainly will hold the winner short of a popular vote majority.

But when there's a significant vote for a third candidate, as in 1968 and 1980, it actually has widened the winner's margin in electoral votes,

the state-by-state competition that settles presidential elections.

The narrowing poll margins near election eve fit the pattern of presidential preference surveys in the final days of a campaign, especially one in which an incumbent president is struggling for a second term.

And Bush remains in electoral vote peril even with his gains in the national polls. The Republicans effectively wrote off states with 145 electoral votes, more than half the 270 it takes to win, earlier in the campaign.

That left Bush competing in states with 393 electoral votes, and means he's got to win more than two-thirds of them. To do that, he will have to capture every battleground state — including some in which the polls show him well behind — while defending GOP territory without a single

slip. Republican National Committee Chairman Rich Bond insisted on Sunday that it is manageable.

"I think you go to your basic coalition of your South and your West and you add on Ohio, New Jersey, Michigan, and that gets you to 270," he said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

But even that southern and western coalition isn't reliably solid this time. And Bush also would have to carry states like Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Missouri to gain an electoral majority.

Brown said the Democrats always expected the polling margins to narrow near the end. He said Clinton's margin has started edging up again, and "it probably is a five- or six- or seven-point race now."

Bill Clinton and George Bush battled across the nation's recession-scarred heartland on Sunday, the front-running Democrat summoning supporters to "fight on" for two more days and the president attacking his rival as "Slick Willie," unfit to lead.

Ross Perot was campaigning in California and unveiled a new 30-minute television commercial that attacked both his rivals as failures on economic leadership.

The daily CNN-USA Today nationwide poll showed Clinton with a seven-point edge over Bush — up from three points on Saturday — and Perot a distant third.

There was more encouragement for the Democrats in a spate of single-state surveys that gave Clinton a comfortable edge in Missouri, a key battleground, and showed Bush with unexpectedly slender leads in traditional base Republican states such as Indiana, South Carolina and Virginia.

Bush's rhetoric grew sharper as the poll tidings grew dimmer.

"Slick Willie," he said of his rival in Auburn Hills, Mich. "He is bobbing and weaving and you can't do that as president."

Clinton, struggling to regain his voice after a string of long days, said the election was a choice between "those who say things are fine and those of us who believe we can do better."

Far more than the White House was at stake in a year of unbridled voter anger at incumbents of both parties, as evidenced by the 14 states with congressional term limitation measures on the ballot.

Republicans all but conceded Democrats would renew their majorities in the Senate and the House on Tuesday, although an unusually large number of races appeared close in the final two days of the campaign.

The states where Clinton and Bush were campaigning in the final 48 hours of their race bore the scars of the

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— Bush

recent recession: Unemployment in Michigan was 8.8 percent in September; New Jersey 9 percent; Ohio 7.1 percent; Pennsylvania 7.6 percent; Connecticut 6.9 percent.

Bush has frequently attributed his political difficulties this year to the economy, and says economic growth has resumed after the recession, although slowly. Asked in a CNN interview what he would say to those who supported him in 1988 but now seem in Clinton's column, he replied:

"I'd say the economy is getting better. Don't listen to those who say we're in a recession. Look at the character issue. Look at the trust issue."

He said Clinton's brand of economics would produce a replica of the Jimmy Carter years: "Interest rates up at 21 percent, inflation at 15. . . . He would not be good for the country."

Clinton partook of three vital American institutions: church, professional football and politics on the final Sunday of his candidacy.

His voice nearly gone, Clinton limited himself to a few words at a tailgate party in the parking lot outside Cincinnati's Riverfront Stadium.

"Fight on. Don't give up. Go." Said Hillary Clinton, his stand-in: "This campaign has been about changing this economy, giving back good jobs to decent, hardworking Americans again and bringing this country together," she said.

Rivals make closing economic arguments

WASHINGTON — For Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton, the campaign season ended much the way it began — in a struggle to keep the spotlight on the nation's economic destiny.

President Bush's thematic odyssey took him from last winter's "Message: I care" to closing arguments that Clinton had run down Arkansas, would raise everyone's taxes and did not have the integrity to sit in the Oval Office.

Clinton's Vietnam-era draft history was the cornerstone of Bush's attempt to raise doubts about his suitability for the White House. But Bush had his own problems on the trust issue — including a late-breaking indictment of former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger that challenged Bush's claims he was "out of the loop" on the Iran-Contra arms-for-

hostages deal.

The president also was challenged on his no-new-taxes pledge. He still branded Clinton as an old-fashioned tax-and-spend Democrat — a line of attack that drew many Republicans belatedly back to the fold.

"Watch your wallets," Bush warned audience after audience.

It was an aggressive appeal against Clinton, who was trying to break out of his party's liberal stereotype.

He was, he said, "a different kind of Democrat" — who supported the death penalty and a two-year cap on welfare; who was "committed not to trickle-down economics and not to tax-and-spend economics" but to investing in jobs, education and infrastructure.

"He has done everything a Democrat needs to do in terms of trying to

reposition himself. We'll see whether the public believes it," said analyst Stuart Rothenberg.

The finale featured TV ads that amounted to statistical duels over Clinton's long Arkansas record and Bush's stewardship of the national economy. In speeches they accused each other of deception and waffling and broken promises.

Clinton called Bush's economic record worse than Herbert Hoover's and, at 46, depicted himself as the logical candidate of change in a year when voters seemed intent on cleaning house.

But Bush, 68, despite his lengthy government resume, wasn't ceding that ground. "Who do you trust to make change?" he asked frequently, and insisted Clinton would make the economy worse.

Shuttle mission ends in Florida

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Columbia swooped through a clear sky and landed at NASA's spaceport Sunday with six astronauts who released a laser-reflecting satellite and tested a robotic eye during their 10-day journey.

"Beautiful ending to a great mission," Kevin Chilton, an astronaut inside Mission Control, told the crew.

Columbia landed on the concrete runway at Kennedy Space Center at 9:05 a.m. EST. Just before nosewheel touchdown, the astronauts released a red, white and blue drag chute that slowed the shuttle as it rolled to a stop.

It was a fine morning for a landing. There were only a few wispy clouds and, contrary to earlier forecasts, barely any fog.

More than 300 people were on hand to welcome Columbia home.

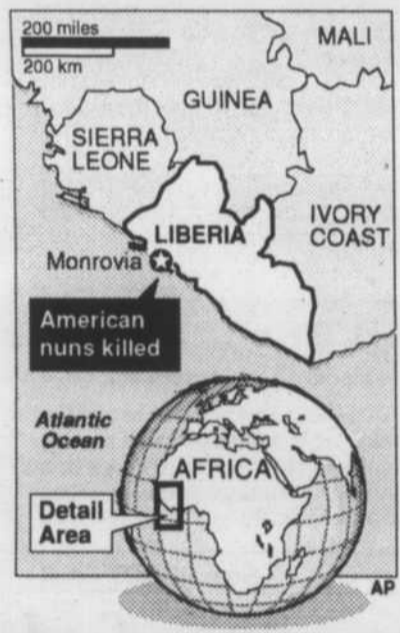
Columbia traveled 4.1 million miles during its voyage, which began Oct. 22, and circled Earth 159 times. It was the 51st shuttle mission and the 13th flight of NASA's oldest shuttle.

A quick inspection showed the shuttle to be in good shape, said NASA launch director Bob Sieck.

Ground controllers had to scramble when shuttle commander James Wetherbee reported during descent the failure of a mechanical gauge that displays the positions of the rudder, body flaps and other flight control surfaces. Mission Control told him to turn the power off and on, which got the gauge working but only for a few minutes.

NASA spokesman Jeff Carr said it appeared to be a power problem and that the crew was able to monitor the information on computer screens.

The five U.S. astronauts and one Canadian completed their primary orbital job — releasing the Laser Geodynamics Satellite — early in the mission. They released the satellite on Oct. 23, and an attached rocket quickly boosted the craft into a 3,632-mile-high orbit.



5 American nuns slain in Liberia

MONROVIA, Liberia — Five American nuns were shot to death behind rebel lines, Monrovia's archbishop said Saturday. A spokesman for the rebels denied they were responsible.

Roman Catholic Archbishop Michael Francis refused to speculate about who killed the nuns, all from Illinois and in their 50s or 60s, but said in an interview they had been "brutally murdered."

Two were killed along a road and the other three were slain in front of their convent outside Monrovia, Francis said, adding that he did not know when they died. The nuns, members of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ order, had been missing for more than a week.

The Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano called the killings a "massacre."

Meanwhile, the battle for Monrovia raged. Two jets of a seven-nation West African force defending the city screamed over the city and headed behind rebel lines, where they have been strafing roads to cut the rebels' supply route.

Clouds of smoke from West African shells rose from Gardnersville, where the American nuns' bodies still lay on the street. It was too dangerous to recover them.

The chief suspects in the slayings were the undisciplined fighters of guerrilla leader Charles Taylor, who have besieged Monrovia for 14 days. Barbara Brilliant, from Brunswick,

Maine, who is one of three remaining American nuns in Liberia, said Taylor's fighters "see the CIA behind every white face." All the slain nuns were white.

In Washington, the State Department called the killings a "cowardly act" and said the nuns were apparently slain several days ago in an area under rebel control.

The United States holds Taylor's forces responsible for the safety of foreign nationals in territory they hold, the State Department said.

John Richardson, a spokesman for Taylor, denied the rebels killed the nuns.

"I can assure you those nuns were never in our area," he told the British Broadcasting Corp.

Bush derides Iran-Contra probe

WASHINGTON — President Bush refused to say Sunday whether he'd fire Iran-Contra prosecutor Lawrence Walsh after Election Day, but accused him of engaging in "a big witch hunt."

Bush went on the attack against Walsh as Democrat Edmund S. Muskie, a member of the bipartisan panel that investigated the Iran-Contra affair, raised new questions about the president's role in the arms-for-hostages dealings.

Muskie said Bush's "claims of ignorance" about arms sales to Iran by the Reagan White House "conflict directly" with the latest revelation in the affair — a note by former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger saying that Bush knew of the arms-for-hostages scheme on Jan. 7, 1986.

Bush has said he didn't realize the Reagan White House was trading arms for hostages until mid-December 1986.

After the arms deal became public, Bush requested an interview with Muskie and the other two members of

the presidentially appointed board, John Tower and Bush's current national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft.

The Tower Board's account of that interview is at the Reagan library in California and won't become public until 1994.

"Nothing emerged from that meeting to suggest that the Vice President was well aware of or significantly involved in the Iranian arms transfers," Muskie said in a statement issued by Democrat Bill Clinton's campaign.

"In short, Vice President Bush presented himself then as President Bush likes to characterize his role now — as being 'out of the loop,'" said Muskie's statement, issued Saturday night.

"But President Bush's repeated claims of ignorance about the arms-for-hostages deal now conflict directly with the personal notes" by Weinberger of the Jan. 7, 1986 meeting, Muskie's statement added.

Scowcroft has steadfastly defended his boss in recent days. He character-

ized as "political." Walsh's decision to include information about Bush in the new indictment of Weinberger.

"They are rehashing the same old stuff, there is no new information," said Scowcroft.

For the first time, Bush was asked Sunday whether he would fire Walsh, whose \$32 million probe began in December 1986.

"I am not going to discuss what I'll do about that," Bush replied in an interview on CNN. But "I think it's been a big witch hunt out there when you see a decent man like Cap Weinberger going through all kinds of hell."

Mary Belcher, a spokeswoman for Walsh's office, said she could not respond to the accusation because the Weinberger case is pending. Weinberger faces trial Jan. 5.

Federal law says Walsh may be removed "only by the personal action of the attorney general and only for good cause." Good cause is defined as an act that "substantially impairs" the performance of his duties.

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