

Bush admits talking with business chairman

■ **The Texas governor says the conversation had nothing to do with a state probe into the business and does not contradict his affidavit.**

AUSTIN (AP) — Gov. George W. Bush, who filed an affidavit swearing he had no conversations with officials of a funeral home business about a state probe, spoke briefly with the company chairman last year but not about the case, Bush's spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Bush, the Republican presidential front-runner, stands by his affidavit, said his spokeswoman Linda Edwards.

Bill Miller, a spokesman for the funeral home company, described the 1998 encounter as a brief, "jocular" one that didn't concern the investigation.

The governor's sworn statement was filed to try to dismiss a subpoena for Bush to give a deposition in a whistle-blower lawsuit brought by Eliza May, the fired executive director of the Texas Funeral Service Commission. Ms. May led the agency's investigation into Houston-based Service Corp. International.

Bush said in his July 20 affidavit, "I have had no conversations with SCI officials, agents, or representatives

concerning the investigation or any dispute arising from it."

On April 15, 1998, Bush and Robert Waltrip, SCI founder and chairman, had an "off-the-cuff" exchange at the Capitol lasting a few seconds, Ms. Edwards said.

The exchange occurred, said SCI spokesman Bill Miller, when Waltrip and SCI lobbyist Johnnie B. Rogers came to the governor's office to hand-deliver a copy of a letter regarding the investigation to Joe Allbaugh, then Bush's chief of staff and now his presidential campaign manager.

The letter was addressed to the head of the Funeral Service Commission and complained of tactics being used by commission staff, Miller said. He said Waltrip and Rogers were waiting to give a copy of the letter to Allbaugh when Bush walked out, on his way elsewhere.

Newsweek magazine, in its Aug. 16 edition, reported that, according to Rogers, Bush said when he spotted Waltrip, "Hey Bobby, are those people still messing with you?"

When Waltrip responded that they were, the magazine reported, Rogers said the governor turned to him and said, "Hey, Johnnie B. Are you taking care of him?" Rogers said he replied, "I'm doing my best, governor," according to the magazine.

Miller said that is Rogers' recollection

of the exchange. Rogers didn't immediately return a telephone call from The Associated Press.

"It was just a jocular exchange between Waltrip and Bush. It didn't evidence anything," Miller said. "It was just an acknowledgment of presence. It wasn't anything about the investigation."

Ms. Edwards said Bush doesn't recall exactly what was said, but that he didn't discuss the case.

"Governor Bush had a very brief, off-the-cuff exchange in passing with Mr. Waltrip that day. Literally, he was on his way out the door," Ms. Edwards said. "The exchange lasted less than 20 seconds. ... He did not discuss the case."

Ms. May's suit alleges that SCI, whose political action committee gave Bush \$35,000 in 1996 and 1997, worked with Bush's staff to interfere with the investigation. The defendants are the funeral commission, SCI and Waltrip.

Bush said in his affidavit that he had no personal knowledge of relevant facts of the investigation and "never asked anyone to take a role or to become involved in any way" in it.

The company has said the dispute is between Ms. May and the state, and believes its inclusion in the suit is a publicity stunt. Miller said: "We didn't interfere with any investigation."

Gore warns against attacks from GOP

MARSHALLTOWN, Iowa (AP) — Vice President Al Gore, seeking a slice of attention from the GOP-driven media frenzy, warned Wednesday against "a right-wing U-turn" from Republicans desperate to win back the White House.

"They are hungry to roll back this progress," Gore said. "They are hungry to win this election."

Gore and former Sen. Bill Bradley of New Jersey swept

through separate sections of the state Wednesday, both focusing on farm issues in hopes of drawing a contrast with Republicans vying for a high-profile straw poll on Saturday.

Bradley spelled out his plan for dealing with a sour farm economy at the Dunlap Livestock Auction. He endorsed the \$11-billion emergency aid package for farmers that the

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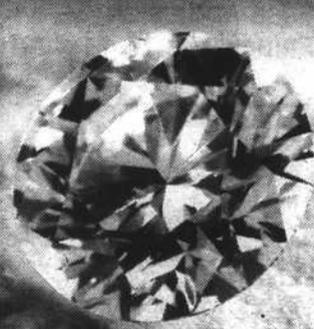
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