

NEWS DIGEST

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PAGE 2

McCain makes an election bid

NASHUA, N.H. (AP) — War hero and senator, John McCain officially opened his Republican presidential campaign Monday, by declaring himself the best candidate to command U.S. troops and reform a political system that is "a spectacle of selfish ambition."

In an address that invoked the patriotic spirits of his father and grandfather — "I was born into America's service" — McCain blended the outlines of a presidential agenda with subtle digs at President Clinton, his Republican presidential rivals and the GOP Congress.

"It is because I owe America more than she has ever owed me that I am a candidate for president of the United States," the Arizona senator and former prisoner of war told a crowd of 500.

He pledged to protect Social Security, cut taxes, veto pork-barrel spending, improve access to the Internet and test the merits of spending government money in private schools nationwide.

His signature issues — decreasing the influence of money in politics and beefing up the U.S. military — are part of what he called "a new patriotic challenge" for the nation. Americans, he said, must take up causes "greater than self-interest."

McCain has been running for president since December 1998.

The formal announcement, originally scheduled for the spring but delayed because of the Kosovo conflict, was designed to bring attention to

his underdog bid.

A former Navy pilot shot down on his 23rd mission over Vietnam in 1967, McCain started his day in the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. A poor student and troublemaker, McCain barely graduated from the academy, but later distinguished himself during 5½ years in a Vietnam prisoner-of-war camp.

"I am the son and grandson of Navy admirals, and I was born into America's service," he said, reading from a TelePrompTer in a dry but well-received speech. "It wasn't until I was deprived of her company that I fell in love with America."

His campaign team believes that McCain's biography is his greatest asset in a field of candidates with less-compelling life stories. McCain made subtle comparisons of his own, criticizing political rivals in both parties.

President Clinton, he said, broke a promise to protect Social Security and weakened the U.S. military.

By promising to "respect the dignity of the office," McCain suggested that Clinton has not.

He said Republicans and Democrats in Congress waste money on unneeded weapons systems while 12,000 military personnel "subsist on food stamps."

He attacked isolationists, saying "walls are for cowards" — a reference to GOP presidential foe Pat Buchanan, who is considering bolting to the

"*I am the son and grandson of Navy admirals, and I was born into America's service.*"

JOHN MCCAIN
Arizona senator

Reform Party.

And he said the next commander-in-chief needs "broad and deep experience," a clear reference to GOP front-runner George W. Bush's lack of foreign policy credentials.

Bush, a two-term Texas governor who served stateside in the Texas Air National Guard during the Vietnam War, has made no secret of his need to bone up on foreign policy and to rely on advisers.

"There comes a time when our nation's leader can no longer rely on briefing books and talking points when the experts and the advisers have all weighed in, when the sum total of one's life becomes the foundation from which he or she makes the decisions that determine the future of our democracy," McCain said.

Russian bombing destroys Chechnya

■ Civilians try to flee after Russian airplanes drop missiles and bombs on the country for the fifth-straight day.

GROZNY, Russia (AP) — Terrified civilians tried to flee Chechnya by the thousands Monday, driven out by a Russian bombing blitz intended to crush Islamic militants in the breakaway republic.

"I wish I were dead," mourned Tamara Aliyeva, 70, whose house in Grozny was destroyed by Russian bombs.

"I don't know what to do or where to go."

Aliyeva joined tens of thousands of Chechens who headed for the neighboring Russian republic of Ingushetia in hopes of finding refuge — only to find the border closed.

In Grozny, Russian airplanes were raining bombs and missiles for the fifth straight day. Witnesses said

oil refineries in Grozny were ablaze, blanketing the capital in choking black smoke.

Russian jets also struck other cities and villages throughout Chechnya, targeting suspected militant bases along with oil derricks and other industrial facilities.

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov claimed Monday that 300 people had been killed in Grozny alone.

The figure could not be independently confirmed.

The bombing is aimed at weakening Islamic militants, who have twice invaded the neighboring Russian republic of Dagestan in recent weeks from their main bases in Chechnya. They also are blamed for a series of terrorist bombings in Moscow and other Russian cities that have claimed 300 lives.

Defense Minister Igor Sergeev said Monday that the bombing of Chechnya would continue "until the last bandit is destroyed," according to the Interfax news agency.

Execution numbers rise to 76; total deaths near pre-ban heights

■ This year's total, which is expected to rise to 100 by year's end, is the highest since 1954.

WASHINGTON (AP) — With three months remaining, 1999 already is the deadliest year on America's death row in almost half a century. Eighteen states have executed 76 killers, and the total could reach 100 by year's end.

"There has been this stairway upward since the death penalty was reinstated" in 1976, said Richard Dieter of the Death Penalty Information Center, a group critical of how capital punishment is administered. "It hasn't peaked yet... 150 is probably where things may max out over the next three to four years."

Executions last Friday in Delaware and North Carolina raised the year's total to 76, the most since 1954, when 81 people were put to death in U.S. prisons. If the year-end toll reaches 100, as Dieter said could happen, it would be the first time since 1951 when 105 people were executed.

There were 68 executions last year and 74 in 1997.

States have executed 576 convicted killers since the Supreme Court ended a four-year nationwide ban on capital punishment in 1976. Currently, about 3,565 people are on death row across the nation.

Many countries have abolished the death penalty, including Canada, Australia, France and Germany. Amnesty International said it received reports of 1,067 executions in China in 1998, more than 100 in the Democratic Republic of Congo and 66 in Iran. The organization said it also has unconfirmed reports of hundreds of executions in Iraq.

Eighteen of the 38 American states with death penalty laws have

imposed capital punishment this year, and once again Texas is first with 25 executions.

"What sometimes people lose sight of is that prosecutors don't give the death penalty — it takes a unanimous 12 folks (on a jury) to do it," said John B. Holmes Jr., district attorney in Harris County, Texas, which includes Houston.

Holmes' office seeks a death sentence in 12 to 20 cases a year and almost always succeeds.

"We have a good sense for knowing whether it's a death-worthy prosecution," he said. "We don't seek it callously or inadvisably. These people we're seeking death on generally have awful records."

Virginia has tallied the second-largest number of executions this year at 11, followed by nine in Missouri and six in Arizona.

Between 1930 and 1967, U.S. prisons carried out 3,859 executions — an annual average of more than 100.

After capital punishment resumed in 1977 with Gary Gilmore's execution by a Utah firing squad, the number of executions rose slowly as many inmates filed multiple appeals to avoid the death chamber.

In recent years, Congress and the Supreme Court have sought to speed up the federal court appeal process by limiting the number of appeals inmates can file.

The number of people sentenced to death across the country averaged about 300 a year from 1986 through 1996, then dipped to 256 in 1997. If that is the beginning of a trend toward fewer death sentences, Dieter said, the number of executions eventually could start heading down as well.

Eight states with death penalty laws have carried out no executions since 1977: Connecticut, Kansas, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, South Dakota and Tennessee.

World and Nation Datelines

■ London Extradition hearing for Pinochet begins

LONDON (AP) — With supporters and opponents of Gen. Augusto Pinochet clamoring outside, lawyers for Spain laid out their case against the former Chilean dictator Monday, saying it constituted "some of the most serious allegations of crime ever to come before English courts."

On the opening day of a long-delayed extradition hearing, lawyers for Spain urged the magistrate to consider not only 34 allegations of torture, but also the anguish of relatives of the 1,198 people who allegedly disappeared during Pinochet's 17-year rule.

Pinochet, who did not attend the hearing, has been detained in Britain since his arrest Oct. 16 at a London hospital.

■ Washington Gingrich, aide avoid questions before trial

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and a congressional aide named in his divorce proceeding are trying to avoid answering questions about their relationship from lawyers for Gingrich's wife.

In court papers filed Monday in Georgia, lawyers for Marianne Gingrich said the former speaker has "willfully failed and refused to answer virtually each and every interrogatory concerning his personal and professional relationships as well as the finances of his marriage."

And in motions filed in Superior Court for the District of Columbia, Callista Bisek, a clerk for the House Agriculture Committee, asked a judge last week to overturn a Georgia court order requiring her to appear Wednesday to answer questions from Marianne Gingrich's lawyers about her relationship with the former speaker.

■ Washington Tripp sues Pentagon for privacy violations

WASHINGTON (AP) — Linda Tripp, whose secret taping helped launch the Monica Lewinsky scandal, says she's been subjected to "extreme public embarrassment, humiliation, anxiety, ridicule" and wants the White House and her Pentagon employers to pay.

Tripp sued the president's office and the Defense Department, alleging Monday they violated her privacy rights by leaking "damaging information... for partisan political purposes" from her confidential government records.

■ Washington Quayle withdraws from presidential race

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dan Quayle, the former vice president who hoped to overcome long odds and ridicule to step up to the Republican presidential nomination in 2000, gave up his White House dreams Monday.

At a Phoenix news conference, Quayle said, "There's a time to stay, and there's a time to fold. There's a time to know when to leave the stage. Thus today I am announcing that I will no longer be a candidate for president of the United States."

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