

Bush seeks support from gays

■ The GOP presidential candidate met with gay Republicans.

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — George W. Bush met with a dozen gay Republicans on Thursday as he kept up his courting of support from outside his party's conservative core.

"I'm a better person for the meeting," he declared.

The presumptive GOP presidential nominee assured conservatives his social views were intact, his opposition to ideas such as gay marriage unshaken by the hour-long session at his campaign headquarters.

The gays he met with, selected by his campaign, were upbeat.

"The goal was not to change his mind. It was to start a conversation," said Steve Gunderson, a former Republican congressman from Wisconsin.

Bush has been portraying himself as a different kind of Republican —

much as Bill Clinton and Al Gore painted themselves as a new breed of Democrat in 1992. And in that light, there could be political gain in spotlighting the meeting — even though gay voters generally support Democrats by margins of 2-to-1 or greater.

But there is danger, too, said David Rohde, a political science professor at Michigan State University.

"You don't want to risk alienating your base vote, and that represents a particular problem for Bush, because if Pat Buchanan is the Reform Party nominee, then the Republican base vote has someplace else to go," Rohde said.

Indeed, Bush was barely back at the Texas Governor's Mansion, where he was crowning the state's new "Bluebonnet Queen," when conservative Gary Bauer warned that Bush was running the risk of driving conservatives to Buchanan.

The former presidential candidate told The Associated Press in an interview: "I don't think it does broaden (the base) when you take that approach.

"I think it would be bizarre to pick somebody to speak at the convention based on their sexual preferences because once you go down that road, why don't you pick a transvestite?"

Gary Bauer

former Republican presidential candidate

That's the approach that we tried in the last two presidential elections. We end up shooting ourselves in the foot."

Bauer also criticized one idea broached at the meeting, having a gay Republican speak at this summer's Republican National Convention.

"I think it would be bizarre to pick somebody to speak at the convention based on their sexual preference, because once you go down that road, why don't you pick a transvestite?" Bauer asked.

Gore spokesman Doug Hattaway said, "Bush owes too much to anti-gay leaders like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell to deliver anything for the gay and lesbian community."

Bush aides dismissed a Buchanan challenge. They told reporters there were none of the "strategic underpinnings" in place for a successful third-party campaign.

Advisers noted that Bush has edged ahead of Gore in many of the latest polls.

U.S. Navy officer arrested in Russia

■ Russian authorities charge officer with trying to buy military secrets.

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian authorities have charged a former U.S. Navy officer with espionage after holding him in a Moscow prison for more than a week, saying he had tried to obtain military secrets, officials said Thursday.

The U.S. Embassy has identified the American as Edmond Pope, but Russian authorities have consistently refused to identify him or a Russian man arrested as an alleged accomplice.

A spokesman with the Federal Security Service, Russia's main intelligence agency, said the American faced up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

The Russian was charged with divulging state secrets and faced 10 years behind bars.

The agency, known by the initials FSB, said it had found documents proving the American had cultivated contacts with Russian scientists in an effort to buy state secrets.

Russian television agencies said he was arrested after paying for plans of a submarine-launched missile.

Pope is being held in Moscow's Lefortovo prison, where he has been visited by U.S. diplomats, U.S. Embassy officials said. A Russian lawyer has been appointed for him.

A woman reached at Pope's home in State College, Pa., who asked not to be identified, said Thursday that the

family was not prepared to comment on the charges.

Pope is a native of Grants Pass, Ore. After retiring from the Navy, Pope worked in 1994-97 with Pennsylvania State University's Applied Research Laboratory, which does research for the military.

Pope was an "assistant for foreign technology" who developed contacts between Russian and U.S. research institutes and worked on converting technology for commercial uses, a statement from Penn State said.

He left the laboratory to create CERF Technologies International, which "has commercial contacts with organizations in Russia," according to the statement.

He frequently traveled to Russia on business, according to the statement.

A friend of Pope's who has kept in touch with him said in a recent newspaper interview that Pope had been concerned he might get framed for his work.

Richard Penny said Pope told him he was being contacted constantly by Russians seeking American cash.

"He said he had a hard time sleeping at night because people were always knocking on his door asking him to buy things," Penny was quoted as saying by the Daily Courier in Grants Pass. "He realized he could be set up."

So far, the reaction to Pope's case has been muted, with neither Russia nor the United States commenting as much as they did during a string of arrests of alleged spies last year.

Court grants temporary stay in battle for Elian

MIAMI (AP) — A federal appeals court issued a temporary stay Thursday that keeps Elian Gonzalez in the United States while the government and his relatives fight over whether he will be returned to his father and sent home to Cuba.

The government said it expected the order would delay any showdown for "three or four days."

The order came barely an hour after the passing of a government deadline for the boy's Miami relatives to hand him over.

Deputy Court Clerk Chris Basnett said the stay was issued shortly after 3 p.m. (2 p.m. CST) It was not immediately clear how long the stay would be in effect.

The Justice Department, however, said it had agreed to wait to reclaim the boy until the court could review the emergency petition filed by Elian's great-uncle Lazaro Gonzalez.

The government had said through most of Thursday that it would act to take custody of the boy after its 2 p.m. deadline passed — a deadline the Miami relatives ignored.

The appeals court asked the Department of Justice to forestall any enforcement action while they review a motion for a temporary injunction by attorneys for Lazaro Gonzalez, the agency said in a statement.

"We agreed to this with a time frame in mind of three or four days," Justice spokeswoman Carole Florman said.

The stay was granted by a single judge from the three-judge panel because it was an emergency. The government was given until 9:30 a.m.

"They will have to take this child from me by force."

Lazaro Gonzalez

Elian's great-uncle

Friday to respond in court.

Earlier, Attorney General Janet Reno said the government would act in a "reasonable, measured way," and would not try to remove the boy immediately after the government-announced deadline.

"We have the authority to take action," Reno said. "But responsible authority means not only knowing when to take action, but how and when to take that action."

After failing to reach an agreement with the family Wednesday during a dramatic 2½-hour meeting attended by Elian, Reno ordered them to bring him to Opa-locka airport outside Miami at 2 p.m. for a flight to Washington.

Lazaro Gonzalez has insisted he would not relinquish custody of the boy he has cared for since Elian's mother drowned off the Florida coast nearly five months ago. "We will not turn this child over — not in Opa-locka, not in any 'locka,'" he said. "They will have to take this child from me by force."

Gregory Craig, attorney for Elian's father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, said after the deadline passed that Elian was being held "unlawfully ... against his father's will."



■ Washington, D.C.

Drug ring that bribed FedEx drivers broken up by arrests

WASHINGTON (AP) — Making dozens of arrests, federal drug agents on Thursday broke up a Jamaican-led narcotics ring that employed bribed FedEx drivers in a scheme to distribute 121 tons of Mexican marijuana to East Coast markets.

The Drug Enforcement Administration said FedEx's top officials fully cooperated with the 18-month investigation, which has led to the arrests of 101 people since it began.

The latest arrests began shortly after midnight Thursday and by late afternoon there had been 45 arrests, 22 of them FedEx employees, DEA agents said at a news conference. Rod Benson, assistant special agent of the DEA's special operations branch said he expected an additional 10 or 15 arrests.

■ Washington, D.C.

Clinton denounces suggestion of pardon for alleged crimes

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Clinton heatedly said Thursday "I'm not ashamed" about being impeached and "I'm not interested" in being pardoned for any alleged crimes in the Monica Lewinsky scandal and Whitewater investigation.

But Clinton did not say whether he would accept a pardon if it were offered by his successor.

Republicans immediately pounced on his failure to answer the question.

"The answer is I have no interest in it. I wouldn't ask for it. I don't think it would be necessary," the president told the convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. "I am prepared to stand before any bar of justice I have to stand before."

■ Ethiopia

Ethiopia's prime minister wants focus on country's famine, not war

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) — Ethiopia's prime minister said Thursday he wants to concentrate on easing a drought-induced famine that threatens 7.7 million of his people, rather than dwell on the regional politics that have taken his country to war.

Prime Minister Meles Zanawi spoke after talks with U.N. World Food Program chief Catherine Bertini, sent by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to assess the food shortage in the Horn of Africa.

"I hope her visit to our country will mark a new beginning in the chapter of this saga where humanitarian issues are separated from political issues," Meles told reporters in Addis Ababa.

■ New York

Firm predicts e-only businesses will bankrupt by next year

NEW YORK (AP) — The battered e-retailing world was hit with another blow this week when a reputable consulting firm predicted that most retailers that operate entirely on the Internet will be out of business by next year.

Intense competition combined with an ongoing selloff in dot-com stocks will result in a rapid rise in buyouts and bankruptcies in the coming months, according to Forrester Research Inc.

The fallout already has begun. Lawyers and consultants are getting swamped with calls for help from companies in distress.

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WEATHER

TODAY

Windy
high 79, low 53

TOMORROW

Partly cloudy
high 70, low 45