

Bush, Gore fighting for electoral college votes

Both candidates' supporters hold hope for election night

PREDICTIONS from page 1

He said the revelation of Bush's arrest for DUI in 1976 probably will have little effect, unless it is shown Bush lied about it. But Bush's misstatement that Social Security was not a federal program may have a greater impact, Hibbing said.

Not surprisingly, Nebraska partisans of different stripes predicted different outcomes.

John Cavanaugh, an Omaha Democrat who served with Gore in the House of Representatives in the 1970s and remains his close friend, predicted Gore would lose the popular vote but win the electoral vote.

"If something doesn't happen in the last few days, that looks more likely than not to happen," he said late last week.

He predicted Gore would do well in many of the tossup states, allowing him to build a winning block of electoral votes.

"When you do the electoral

math, it's hard to see how Gore can lose," he said.

But Chuck Sigerson, chairman of the Nebraska Republican Party, predicted Bush would win by a substantial margin, perhaps capturing more than 300 electoral votes.

"I think he's going to win big time," he said.

Sigerson dismissed the possibility of Gore losing the popular vote and winning the electoral vote, calling it "another Democratic ploy to get Democrats to vote."

Hibbing said the close election has been exciting, but it is unlikely to raise voter turnout. Usually in a highly competitive race, the turnout is high. But Hibbing said some voters may be uninspired by either candidate or may believe there are no substantial differences between them.

In any case, it could be a late Tuesday night. Or an early Wednesday morning.

Election observers doubt Gore's chances in Nebraska

BY BRIAN CARLSON

Although some Democrats haven't given up hope that Al Gore could peel off one of Nebraska's electoral votes, it looks like George W. Bush will sweep all five.

In a recent copyrighted Omaha World-Herald poll, Bush held a 56-31 percentage-point statewide lead over Gore. In a September poll, Gore trailed Bush by just four points in the 2nd District, but Bush now leads by a commanding 16 points there.

Nebraska and Maine are the only states that award electoral votes to the winners of each congressional district. In the other 48 states, the statewide winner captures all the state's electoral votes.

If Bush wins Nebraska, he will follow the lead of many Republicans before him. The GOP presidential candidate has captured Nebraska in every election since 1964, when Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson's nationwide rout of Barry Goldwater extended to Nebraska.

Election 2000

Bill Clinton won Lincoln in both 1992 and 1996, but he did not perform well enough in the rest of the 1st District to capture an electoral vote.

John Cavanaugh, an Omaha Democrat who served with Gore in the House of Representatives during the 1970s, remains a close friend of Gore's.

Earlier this fall, Cavanaugh concocted a scheme in which Gore would win 270 electoral votes to Bush's 268, with Omaha providing the winning margin. He said Democrats would continue to scrape for an electoral vote in Nebraska.

"We don't put a lot of stock in the World-Herald poll," he said. "We still think there's a shot."

Cavanaugh said Nebraska Democrats would be energized by Gore's competitiveness in Iowa and other swing states.

But Nebraska Republicans scoffed at the idea that Gore

could compete with Bush here.

"This state is just going to slam the door on Al Gore," Gov. Mike Johanns said. "I just see no support out there except from die-hard Democrats who always vote Democratic no matter what."

Johanns, who has traveled around the country with other GOP governors to campaign for Bush, predicted Bush would win 60-65 percent of the vote in Nebraska.

Chuck Sigerson, chairman of the Nebraska Republican Party, said Bush could win Nebraska by the largest margin of any state in the nation. He said Gore never had a chance in Nebraska.

"It was Democratic propaganda," he said. "We never felt he was close anywhere in the state."

"Come on. This was a ploy by John Cavanaugh and the Democratic Party to give their voters something to be excited about," Sigerson said.

Bill Avery, a political science professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a

Democratic national committee-man, said Gore's strong 2nd District showing in the earlier poll probably reflected the bounce he received after the Democratic National Convention in August.

Avery acknowledged Gore's chances in Nebraska probably were slim.

"I think in a statewide poll you don't have a big enough sample to get an accurate reading in each district," he said referring to The World-Herald poll. "But even if the numbers are wrong, they can't be so far wrong. It's probably pretty remote."

Robert Sittig, a UNL political science professor, said Gore had a chance at one time to win the 2nd District. But the Gore campaign had to focus its efforts on swing states and didn't make the necessary investment in Nebraska, he said.

"It was kind of tantalizing to think about," he said. "The potential, I think, was there. But it had to be stroked up and worked at. Nothing was done, and now I can't imagine it happening."

Nelson would bring centrist stances, pragmatic thinking to Senate, some say

NELSON from page 1

As governor, he guided the state during a tax crisis that took several special legislative sessions to resolve. He also led the creation of a state lottery.

Seeking reelection in 1994, he crushed GOP challenger Gene Spence, winning 74 percent of the vote.

Emboldened by that eyebrow-raising victory, Nelson entered the 1996 Senate race when Sen. James Exon announced his retirement.

The trouble was, he had declared in 1994 that he would serve out his term as governor. But in 1996, with a Senate seat open, he was breaking that pledge.

Heavily favored initially, Nelson suffered a stunning defeat at the hands of Chuck Hagel, who rose from obscurity to defeat Nelson by 16 percentage points. It was a stinging defeat for Nelson, who then served out his final two years as governor.

Nelson found it difficult to campaign because of his mother's health problems. She died that fall, and later he said he regretted not dropping out of the race.

It wasn't until later that Nelson realized only one sitting governor had ever been elected to the Senate in the middle of a term.

Nelson insists he is not campaigning for redemption this year.

"It isn't about that. It's about serving the people in the United States Senate," he said. "I overcame the loss in 1996 by finishing out my term for two years. I overcame whatever feelings I had about it."

Earlier this year, when Sen. Bob Kerrey announced he would not seek a third Senate term, the door opened for Nelson to reenter politics.

During his tenure as governor, Nelson pushed nearly 70 percent of his proposed legislation through the Legislature.

Lincoln Mayor Don Wesely, who served in the Legislature during all eight years of Nelson's tenure as governor, said his success was due to toughness coupled with pragmatism.

"He's not an ideologue," Wesely said. "He's pragmatic, and he wants to work through the issues."

Wesely said he usually agreed with Nelson, but not always. For example, Nelson was at the national forefront in promoting welfare reform. Wesely disagreed with Nelson's plan for trimming the welfare rolls.

"He's definitely a moderate Democrat. It's a stretch to suggest Ben Nelson would be a liberal," Wesely said, laughing.

Nelson's approach to politics is based more on practical politics than passion, which can be both a strength and a weakness, Wesely said.

"He's more pragmatic than impassioned. It can be frustrating when you feel impassioned about issues and he doesn't," he said.

"But you're glad when you disagree with him that he's not passionately opposed to you. He's a guy who's in sharp contrast to Don Stenberg, who I believe is an ideologue," Wesely said.

Nelson can be trusted when he pledges to work across party lines, Wesely said.

"I think he's very likable," he said. "What you see is what you get. Republicans can feel confident that he will listen to them as well."

Kerrey said Nelson would continue the tradition of Nebraska senators who think independently.

"He's the only candidate who's not promised to be somebody's lapdog if elected to the Senate," he said.

But Chuck Sigerson, chairman of the Nebraska Republican Party, said Nelson's claim to be an independent thinker contrasts with his longtime involvement in the Democratic Party.

He notes that Nelson has served as Nebraska chairman for Democratic presidential candidates Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Al Gore. All seven of his appointees to the Nebraska Supreme Court were Democrats.

"If he ever got back to D.C., he'd pal around with Al Gore, Bill

Clinton, Janet Reno and Ted Kennedy," Sigerson said. "You're known by the brand you wear. He wears the Democratic brand."

He also criticized Nelson's running for Senate in 1996 despite his pledge to serve out his second term.

"If you can't trust a man's word, how can you trust him to represent you?" Sigerson said.

Nelson said he regretted the pledge, but said he let the voters decide whether to release him.

Despite what Wesely said, Nelson said he would bring passion to Washington.

"I'll be passionate about solving the farm problems today," he said. "I'll be passionate about health care and Social Security, and I'll be passionate about education."

On many issues, Nelson is a centrist or even a conservative. He supported welfare reform and the death penalty and opposes abortion. On those issues, he differs lit-

tle from Stenberg.

But unlike Stenberg, Nelson opposes partial privatization of Social Security. He prefers to extend the program's solvency by shoring it up with budget surplus funds.

He supports a more modest tax cut than Stenberg and wants to use the surplus to reduce the national debt and preserve Social Security.

Some critics say Nelson is thin-skinned, that he doesn't take

criticism well. Nelson insists he just wants to make sure people understand his views. Often, when he fully explains his views, he can persuade people to reconsider, he said.

Tomorrow, he's hoping to recapture the magic of 1990 and 1994 and put behind the bad memories of 1996.

"The greatest strength I showed during my eight years as governor was to step up and be a leader," he said.

Odd candidates give election some spice

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

There's the Arkansas candidate for Congress who promises to jump out of an airplane if elected. The Nevada teacher running for office on a dare from her sixth-grade class. And the Pennsylvania ex-legislator who has to get permission from his probation officer to make campaign appearances.

Election-time is here again, and at the margins, beyond the headlines of the presidential race, the untidy beast called democracy is offering up some doozies.

Consider Pat DiNizio, lead singer for the New Jersey band The Smithereens — and Reform Party candidate for the U.S. Senate. He's spent about \$40,000; one opponent, Jon Corzine, is approaching \$60 million. But DiNizio's got something that Corzine ain't got: The freedom to be unrepentantly unorthodox.

So he's visited homes to give concerts — punctuated by political speeches. He has run an ad showing himself in a fictitious wrestling match with Corzine and

Rabbit Bob Franks. He goes into diners and gets attention by saying things like, "Wake up! Life is not just veal parmesan!"

In New York City, Republican Martha Tuberma, 81, is running for a state Senate seat in the Bronx — much to her surprise. She thought her candidacy was a rumor until the Board of Elections letter arrived. Seems GOP workers gathered more than 1,000 signatures on her behalf. "You think I'd run for any political office?" she says. "I'd have to be out of my mind."

Let's move to Reno, Nev., where sixth-grade teacher Tierney Cahill, a Democrat, is running for Congress because her students dared her to.

Arkansas Republican congressional candidate Bob Thomas has been sponsoring traffic and weather reports on KARN-AM in Little Rock. Listeners hear: "Brought to you by Bob Thomas, who promises to jump out of an airplane if he beats Vic Snyder in November in the 2nd Congressional Race."

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