

Race comes down to court battle

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

George W. Bush and Al Gore marshaled their legal forces Sunday for a climactic state Supreme Court showdown.

GOP lawyers said it would be unjust "to keep the state and the nation on hold" during interminable recounts. Democrats said the truth can't be rushed, as jangled nerves and protests punctuated another painstaking day of south Florida vote-counting.

With the long-count election stretching into a third agonizing week, the court strategy of both camps reached critical mass: Republicans hope to stop manual recounts that threaten Bush's 930-vote lead out of 6 million cast; Gore wants the work to grind away under rules most favorable to Democrats.

The candidates kept a low profile as their lawyers prepared for a momentous two-hour court hearing today. Each went for a jog and to church.

Calling these days "extraordinary times," Bush's lawyers argued in court papers that Republican Secretary of State Katherine Harris has the authority to certify election results without accepting hand counts. They said allowing the recounts to continue in selected Democratic-leaning counties would violate the constitutional rights of voters.

"The selective manual recounts authorize county boards to engage in arbitrary and unequal counting of votes, and result in the disparate treatment of Florida voters based

solely on where within the state they happen to reside," Bush argued.

In a separate brief, Harris tried to distance herself from both Bush and Gore, even as Democrats pointed to her GOP presidential campaigning as a sign of bias. All seven Supreme Court justices were appointed by Democratic governors.

"It is clear that for the Democrats and the Republicans, the object is to win, and that is understandable," Harris' brief said. "The stakes are very high."

In its paper reply, the Gore team asked the court to set a generous standard for officials to "ascertain the electorate's will" when they punched ballots in the disputed presidential election. They said local election officials in close cases can "determine the voter's intent."

Twelve days after America voted, the weekend tally of overseas absentee ballots lengthened Bush's tiny 300-vote lead to a still-minuscule 930.

With recounts under way in two Democratic-leaning counties and a third set to begin, Gore had a net gain of 76 votes, which, if allowed, would cut Bush's lead to 854.

Gore narrowly won the national popular vote and holds a slight edge over Bush in the all-important Electoral College tally, though neither man can reach the required total of 270 electoral votes without Florida's 25.

The Texas governor spent the day with his family in Austin, Texas.

"It is clear that for the Democrats and the Republicans, the object is to win, and that is understandable. The stakes are very high."

Katherine Harris
Florida Secretary of State

Gore canceled plans to attend a long-scheduled conference in Tennessee, the home state that deserted him for Bush on Election Day. About 100 pro-Bush protesters packed the sidewalks across from his official residence in Washington.

"We want Bush!" they shouted.

The identity of America's 43rd president rests with the courts and in the ballot-counting rooms of Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties, where more than 1.5 million ballots were cast, a majority from Democrats.

"It seems to be that they're doing everything they can to stop the recounting of votes because they're slightly ahead and they fear that after the recounting they won't be," said Democratic vice presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman, who conducted a rare tour of all five major news shows Sunday.

World/Nation

The Associated Press

Yemen

Authorities detain suspects in bombing of U.S. warship

ADEN — In one portrait emerging from Yemen, the plotters who attacked a U.S. warship in the port of Aden came from across the region, inspired by hatred, hardened by war and determined enough to try again and again until they were able to strike a mighty target.

Yemeni sources close to the investigation of the Oct. 12 bombing say authorities have detained six Yemeni men they believe were key accomplices. Scores of people have been held so far, but the sources said these six are the first described as central players — including a main plotter.

The sources, who spoke late last week on the condition they not be named, said no charges would be filed until the investigation was complete.

United States

Electors' opinions divided on fate of Electoral College

More than a third of this year's Democratic presidential electors say they want to re-examine or scrap the Electoral College that takes the final vote on the next person in the White House, while fewer than one in 10 Republicans think the nation should even consider tinkering with the system, an Associated Press survey found.

The partisan breakdown is not surprising, given that the Democratic candidate, Al Gore, may lose the presidency while winning the popular vote. Republican George W. Bush, if declared the victor in Florida, would win the crucial electoral vote.

The AP interviewed 342 electors, or nearly two-thirds of the 538-member Electoral College.

"It's silly," said Gore elector Lana Boldi, a political coordinator for United Auto Workers in Michigan. "We're 200 years or more past when we really need that safeguard. I think the average voter is intelligent enough to cast a popular vote."

Austria

Increased development may be destroying Alps

KAPRUN — After decades of development as Europe's year-round playground, the Alps may be suffering from overload.

Mudslides, avalanches and last weekend's fire in the Kitzsteinhorn mountain tunnel that killed 155 people have led some environmentalists to question whether it's time to scale back on the construction of resorts, hiking trails and ski runs that expanded as Europe's economy has grown.

"We cannot continue to treat the mountains as we have in the past and maintain this pace into the future," said Daniela Grabher of the Austrian Ecological Institute in Bregenz.

Russia

Officials offer new theories on cause of Kursk's demise

MOSCOW — A top Russian official claimed Sunday that sounds initially called distress signals from the crew of the sunken submarine Kursk instead came from a different vessel in the area.

Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov suggested the vessel may have been making the signals after colliding with the Kursk, causing the explosions that destroyed the submarine and killed all 118 men aboard.

The cause of the disaster remains unclear. Klebanov, who leads the government commission investigating the Aug. 12 accident, has focused on the theory that the Kursk was hit by a foreign submarine but has provided no proof.

The government also is considering an explosion in the Kursk's torpedo compartment.

Clinton stresses shared interests

The U.S. President urged Vietnam's government to open its economy for the good of both countries.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam — Returning from a historic trip to Vietnam, President Clinton said Sunday that "a big welcome" awaits Americans in this struggling communist nation as it looks with hope to the future without bitterness about the wartime past.

"The years of animosity are past," Clinton said a quarter century after the Vietnam War ended with a communist takeover of U.S.-backed South Vietnam. "Today we have a shared interest in your well-being and your prosperity."

Clinton urged Vietnam to open its economy and allow greater individual freedoms. Despite Clinton's optimism, Vietnam's powerful Communist Party chief, Le Kha Phieu, expressed wariness about economic reforms and America's involvement in Vietnam.

Phieu emphatically stated that while the former Soviet Union has crumbled, the socialist system in Vietnam still stands, Clinton's economic adviser Gene Sperling said, recounting the



President Clinton speaks Sunday during a visit to the International Container Terminal in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Clinton is the first American president to visit Vietnam since the war ended in 1975.

talks Saturday in Hanoi.

"What was the cause of our resistance against foreign aggression?" the Communist Party newspaper Nhan Dan quoted Phieu asking Clinton. "The root cause was because imperialism colonized other countries."

In an interview with CNN, Clinton said he had "a nice little debate" with Phieu about the United States and "stoutly disputed that we were an imperialist country."

"We had never had any imperialist designs here," Clinton said.

Clinton said the trend toward freedom in Vietnam "is virtually

irreversible ... And as you can see in the streets, there is a lot of goodwill toward America here."

Departing Ho Chi Minh City on Sunday, Air Force One was loaded with silks, purses, paintings, lacquer ware and other gifts purchased by the presidential entourage on a 22,192-mile, week-long trip to an Asian summit in Brunei and the groundbreaking stop in Vietnam.

Clinton's plane was stopping in Alaska to refuel, with a scheduled arrival in Washington before dawn today.

"I am going home determined to continue the partner-

ship we have for a better future for the people of Vietnam, the people of the United States and all those whom we can reach together," Clinton told a group of business leaders just before his departure.

Clinton was the first president to visit this country since 1969 and the first ever to stop in Hanoi. While he spoke hopefully of the future, there were reminders of the painful past.

During his stay, he visited an excavation site near Hanoi, where searchers probed the mud for the remains of a U.S. pilot shot down 33 years ago. He met

with children disfigured by forgotten land mines. And he watched silently as the remains of three MIAs began the journey home.

In a gesture for religious freedom, Clinton met Sunday with Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Man, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City.

White House officials said they spoke of problems the archbishop faces in a country where international human rights groups and the State Department cite a pattern of harassment and imprisonment of Buddhist and other religious leaders.

Israel scales back retaliation efforts

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM — After seven weeks of Mideast bloodshed, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat aren't on speaking terms, but both are speaking of restraint.

Barak said Sunday that Israel didn't want to escalate the conflict, and therefore was not planning to retaliate for the shooting death of an Israeli soldier.

Palestinian leaders said they were working to implement Arafat's recent call for an end to shooting from territory under his control.

Unrest on Sunday was scarce, though still deadly. A

14-year-old Palestinian boy was killed and six Palestinians injured in a brief clash in the Gaza Strip, doctors said. Also, an Israeli diplomat suffered minor wounds in a shooting attack in the capital of neighboring Jordan.

Previous lulls have lasted only briefly, followed by renewed spasms of unrest. Still, both sides said Sunday there were hopeful signs that calm could be restored.

Israeli army chief Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz said the Palestinians have not issued a cease-fire order, but the Palestinian leadership was "on the road to reducing its (hostile) activities."

Democrats debate ballots in high court

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Democrats asked Florida's Supreme Court on Sunday to set a generous standard for deciding what voters really meant when they punched ballots in the disputed presidential election.

Republicans argued it was unfair "to keep the state and the nation on hold" any longer.

Lawyers for Democrat Al Gore argued that previous state court rulings have established the rules for discerning the will of the voter in close elections.

"The Secretary of State and Governor Bush nonetheless urge this Court to construe Florida law to prevent county canvassing boards — which are charged under Florida law with primary responsibility for counting ballots — from utilizing the procedures long established in Florida law ... to ascertain the electorate's will in close elections such as this one," Gore's filing said. "This court should reject that approach."

Democrats want the Florida Supreme Court to establish a standard to approve or reject ballots in the three counties where hand recounts are under way or scheduled.

"For more than 80 years, it has been settled Florida law that a ballot must be counted if the voter's intent is apparent from an examination of the ballot," Gore's lawyers wrote.

"For more than 80 years, it has been settled Florida law that a ballot must be counted ..."

Al Gore's lawyers
filing with the Florida high court

Weather

TODAY
Partly cloudy
high 30, low 19

TOMORROW
Mostly sunny
high 43, low 24

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