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Guy C. Brown
British Biochemist

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Bush ready for election

AUSTIN (AP) — George W. Bush jokes that the problem with engaging in mock debates with Sen. Judd Gregg is that often "he wins."

The New Hampshire Republican has been playing the role of Democrat Al Gore in practice sessions with the Texas governor. And while Bush likes to give the impression he is not putting much time or energy into such rehearsals, the preparation has been underway for months.

One sparring session between Bush and Gregg — at Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas, during the Democratic convention last month — found its way to the Gore campaign. Gore's camp turned the tape over to the FBI, which is investigating.

With the first debate a week away on Oct. 3, Bush was heading to Austin on Wednesday for a practice session. And at least one full 90-minute session with a moderator and formal trappings are planned for the weekend.

There's a danger in rehearsing too much, Bush says. "Either you're ready or you're not ready," he says. He thinks he is.

Some Republicans privately have voiced concern that Bush is not taking debate preparation seriously enough, suggesting he chafes at practice sessions and tries to get out of them when he can.

Gregg "has managed to capture the condescending air that Gore uses in debates ..."

— Karen Hughes
Bush communications director

Still, the Texas governor has been poring over briefing books given him by staff.

Bush says he's trying to familiarize himself with the specifics of Gore's various proposals and also is refreshing himself with details of his own proposals, especially those he doesn't refer to often on the campaign trail.

The lean, reticent Gregg looks nothing like Gore. But, according to Bush campaign officials, he has an uncanny ability to sound like him.

"I told him, 'You're good,'" said Bush communications director Karen Hughes, who has been with him during all debate rehearsals.

Gregg "has managed to capture the condescending air that Gore uses in debates," said Hughes, "never missing an opportunity to get in a dig at the vice president."

Bush at first balked at the schedule for three debates outlined by a bipartisan commission that has overseen presidential debates since 1988.

He agreed initially to only one, challenging Gore to meet him in less-formal settings for the other two — in particular, joint appearances on NBC's "Meet the Press" and on CNN's "Larry King Live."

Gore wouldnt take the bait, and Bush eventually agreed to the schedule set forth by the commission. Gore partisans accused Bush of trying to duck the debates.

Congressmen ask DOE to release plant info

HOUSTON (AP) — Two Texas congressmen have asked the U.S. Department of Energy to release information concerning two South Texas chemical plants briefly used to extract uranium to determine whether residents were unknowingly exposed to radioactive materials.

U.S. Reps. Nick Lampson, D-Beaumont, and Rep. Ken Bentsen, D-Houston, have asked for records of the plants run by the now-defunct Texas City Chemicals plant between 1952 and 1956 and the former Pasadena Chemical Corp. from 1951 to 1952, the Hous-

ton Chronicle reported in Tuesday's editions.

The chemical plants were briefly test beds for extracting uranium from phosphate ore, which was used at the plants to manufacture fertilizer. The plants each extracted at least 50 pounds of uranium.

"The workers in those plants deserve the same consideration as those in silos," Bentsen said. "They were part and parcel of the U.S. defense system during the Cold War. The government should honor its commitment to service people, but also to workers."

Lampson has also asked his fellow congressmen to pass a special compensation bill for workers at the private plants in Texas City and Pasadena and those who have suffered or died from health problems caused by exposure to radioactive materials.

Officials from the Department of Energy said they do not know how many people may have been exposed to radioactive or hazardous material from the plants or how waste was disposed.

State environmental and health officials, however, said they have inspected the sites nu-

merous times in the past 20 years and believe there is no radioactive material remaining.

The call for an investigation into the plants' work was partially sparked by local union officials concerned about what became of the waste and residents' exposure to air-borne dust from the operations.

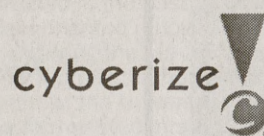
A 1977 survey of the Texas City site, which is now a large tract of undeveloped land owned by BP Amoco, showed above-normal levels of radiation in the soil. But the survey found no conclusive link to nuclear fuel processing.

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