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Gov. Jeb Bush pushed to plea for Haitian release

MIAMI (AP) — A congresswoman pressed Gov. Jeb Bush on Wednesday to ask his brother, the president, to order the release of 200 Haitian immigrants detained in Florida after they jumped off a freighter and waded ashore.

The Republican governor was confronted during a campaign stop by Rep. Carrie Meek, D-Fla., who said the Haitians should be treated like Cuban immigrants.

"All you have to do is call — the wet foot-dry foot policy would take effect," Meek said.

Normally, Cuban immigrants are allowed to remain in the United States if they reach land, while those intercepted at sea are returned.

The governor said he agrees Haitian immigrants should be released until their asylum request is heard, like immigrants from other countries.

"Haitians should be treated in the same fashion that Jamaicans, people from the Bahamas, people from any country in the world," Bush said.

A day earlier, the governor said he had called White House officials regarding the immigrants, but he did not elaborate Wednesday or say whether he

had spoken with his brother.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said the Haitians were being treated fairly and humanely and that the president would not intervene.

"The Immigration and Naturalization Service will apply the law and make the proper judgments," Fleischer said.

The 50-foot wooden freighter carrying 211 Haitians and three Dominicans ran aground Tuesday on a stretch of beach near a road south of downtown Miami. Six Haitian nationals were charged with illegal smuggling in the case.

The Haitian immigrants included 150 men, 35 women and 26 juveniles, INS spokeswoman Barbara Gonzalez said. One of the minors was hospitalized for dehydration.

Gonzalez declined to say whether any of the immigrants had asked for asylum.

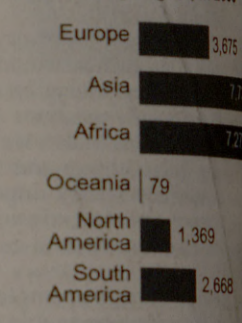
The immigrants' detention sparked protests by Haitian-Americans who said U.S. laws discriminate by favoring other immigrants — particularly Cubans.

Jean Robert Lafortune, president of the Haitian-American Grassroots Coalition, said the detention poses a leadership test

Who gets asylum

The number of refugees who were granted asylum in the United States was 22,861 in 2000. Haitians made up just more than half of those granted asylum from North America.

Number of individuals granted asylum by region, in 2000



NOTE: North America includes Caribbean and Central America. There are 67 stateless or origin unknown individuals also granted asylum.

SOURCE: Immigration and Naturalization Service

for Gov. Bush. "If Bush could champion this issue, he could shift the balance in the election," Lafortune said. "The time for lip service is over."

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Man shot wife then himself at daycare

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — A man shot his estranged wife to death inside a daycare center Wednesday morning, then turned the gun on himself, police said.

The 32-year-old man underwent surgery. Officials said his injuries did not appear to be life-threatening.

The woman, who was sta-

tioned at Fort Bliss Army post in El Paso, was dropping off her 5-year-old daughter.

Police Sgt. Al Velarde said 21 children were inside the Little Red Apple Daycare at the time. No children or staff were injured.

Latin Kings members arrested Wednesday

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — Forty-one people identified as mem-

bers of the Latin Kings street gang were arrested Wednesday on charges that include attempted murder and drug distribution, authorities said.

The gang operates in suburban New Jersey and recruits members at high schools in New York, Pennsylvania and Illinois, said Peter C. Harvey, state attorney general.

They described the gang as well-organized and extremely violent.

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