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Nov. 5 election scramble heads for decision; turnout seen as key

AP-President Bush barnstormed through four battleground states on Monday in a final appeal for Republicans in Congress who will vote to make tax cuts permanent and confirm conservative judges. Democrats worked for a strong voter turnout to tilt key races their way.

"We'll see what the voters and the Good Lord has in store tomorrow," said Republican gubernatorial candidate Mark Sanford in South Carolina, summing up the hopes — and anxiety — of candidates everywhere.

While Bush and the Democrats focused their energies on dozens of races, Minnesota Senate rivals Walter F. Mondale and Norm Coleman staged the final debate of the campaign season. They were partially upstaged by the governor's appointment of an interim replacement for the late Sen. Paul Wellstone.

In the House, where all 435 seats are at stake on Tuesday, Democrats need a gain of seven to win control. But it was the Republicans who sounded upbeat — suggesting they could even defy historical trends and pick up a seat or two at Bush's midterms.

The Senate is divided 49-49, with two independents, and the battle for control hinged on six or eight races judged as tossups or nearly so in the late polls.

South Dakota was home to one, pitting Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson against GOP Rep John Thune. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, the state's other senator, worked to preserve Johnson's Senate tenure — and his own grip on power as leader of the Democratic majority.

In Minnesota, Mondale and Coleman vied for Wellstone's seat in their only debate of a one-week campaign.

The two men debated as Gov. Jesse Ventura was announcing his selection of Dean Barkley, an independent, as interim replacement for Wellstone. Wellstone died late last month in the crash of a small plane.

Bush, his approval ratings over 60 percent, worked his way from Iowa to Missouri, Arkansas and Texas, the end of an intense effort to elect Republican governors and members of the House and Senate.

"I'll be voting in Crawford, Texas, tomorrow morning," the president said in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. "I'm not undecided."

As he has at dozens of rallies, he stressed the importance of the war on terrorism, criticized Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and renewed his call for a Department of Homeland Security built to his specifications.

Bush said judicial appointments were "a defining issue. ... And we got a problem because the leadership in the Senate has done a lousy job with my nominees."

The Democratic-controlled Senate has blocked passage of bills to make portions of last year's tax cuts permanent, citing the reappearance of budget deficits. Democrats have confirmed dozens of Bush's judicial appointees, but have blocked others they deem too conservative.

While Bush was barnstorming, Democrats put their hopes in a large turnout of key constituencies, blacks and members of union households among them.

"If we get the vote out, we'll win this election," Democratic gubernatorial candidate Bill McBride said in Florida, where polls showed him trailing Gov. Jeb Bush.

Democrats elected governors in Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama four years ago, in large measure because of strong support from black voters. Two years ago, presidential candidate Al Gore ran better in several Southern states than anticipated.

"I would say that minority turnout will be most influential in Louisiana, Georgia, Texas and even Colorado" in the Senate races, said Sen. Bill Frist, the head of the GOP senatorial campaign committee.

Donna Brazille, a consultant to the Democrats, said the turnout effort this year includes paid radio advertisements, flyers

Hot issues for Tuesday's winners

Some issues in Tuesday's House and Senate elections are more likely than others to rise or fall based on which party ends up with a majority in Congress. Here's a look at some of the issues most sensitive to control of Congress.

Taxes, Economy
Last year's \$1.3 trillion package of tax cuts was set to expire in a decade; the two parties are vying over whether to let the reductions permanent. Democrats stress the need for ideas to stimulate the economy, including increases in employment benefits, an increase in the minimum wage and lower business taxes.

Mental health
Many members in both parties support a requirement for "health parity" in health insurance plans. The President's health care plan, however, does not, and has blocked it. Under the proposed requirement, any plan that includes coverage for mental health would have to treat them the same as physical illnesses. Some fear the mandate might prompt companies to drop mental health coverage altogether.

Drug coverage
Both parties want to provide prescription drug coverage for the elderly but disagree over how to do that and how to pay for it. Under a \$20-billion plan that would be paid for by the Republican-led House, people would face out-of-pocket expenses as high as \$3,700 a year. The Democratic-led Senate considered another variety of plans that proposed better benefits and would be paid for by Republicans control both the House and Senate.

Social Security
One of President Bush's main promises in the 2000 election was to start letting people take some of the money they've put into the Social Security system and put it into private retirement accounts. Most Democrats oppose any form of privatization. The Senate has confirmed 60 private accounts, but the House has not yet passed any legislation.

Judges
Seventeen U.S. District Court nominees put forward by Bush are waiting for a Senate vote, as well as one special court judge. The Senate has confirmed 10 judges and rejected several since Bush took office. Bush says Democrats are standing in the way of a "sound judiciary." Democrats say Bush is favoring overly conservative nominees who would strip away civil rights, civil rights and more. The stakes will rise if a vacancy opens up on the Supreme Court, which now is closely divided on abortion.

SOURCE: Associated Press

NEWS IN BRIEF

Perry raises speed limit in Houston area

HOUSTON (AP) — Residents in the eight counties around Houston will soon see the unpopular 55 mph speed limit — imposed earlier this year as part of a clean air plan — slowly fade in their rear view mirrors.

Gov. Rick Perry on Monday announced the speed limit will

be raised to 65 mph. Perry said the timing of the announcement, which came on the eve of Tuesday's election, was coincidental.

While state officials had given the go-ahead to raise the speed limit, final approval was needed from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Mark Sanders, spokesman for Tony Sanchez, Perry's Democratic opponent, called

the timing of the announcement "suspicious."

NBC to buy Bravo from Cablevision

NEW YORK (AP) — NBC is buying the Bravo cable entertainment network from Cablevision Systems Co., a deal expected to improve NBC's cable presence and boost Cablevision's finances. The 1.25 billion cash-and-stock

deal announced Monday should benefit NBC by giving it a new outlet for programs. NBC/Bravo projects could include reality shows, new and specials.

The deal is also considered good news for Cablevision, which decided to sell Bravo to reduce debt load. It has an 80 percent stake in the cable channel, the remaining 20 percent is owned by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

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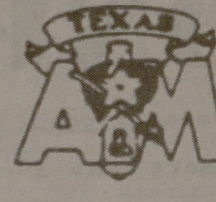
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In a recent on campus debate between the Aggie Democrat and the College Republicans, Jeff Graham, director of the Aggie Democrat, and a Republican, Jeff Williams, argued over the issue of whether the party should be more loyal to Democrats or Republicans to control Congress.

In fact, Democrats will show candidate Ron K... seat left vacant... they're specifically attract white voters. Williams column Williams accuse dollars to appeal. To some, it n... Texas Democrat on the support of that shows up at the voting booth campaign strate... In both the n... 91 percent of bl... election, accord... should really be... considering that... overwhelming a... Party since 1934

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