

Poll finds Bush, Dole lead GOP in 2000 presidential race

By Mark Z. Barabak,
Los Angeles Times

Two potential presidential candidates, George W. Bush and Elizabeth Hanford Dole, lead a pack of GOP hopefuls bidding for the Republican nomination in 2000, according to a new Los Angeles Times poll. Even as they ponder whether to run, both lead Vice President Al Gore, the overwhelming Democratic favorite, in potential trial heats that found broad crossover support for Bush and Dole among Democrats and independents.

With the impeachment trial of President Clinton in full swing, the survey also offered mixed news for Republicans who might fear a backlash from efforts to oust the popular incumbent. A majority of Americans said a vote on impeachment would have no impact on whom they support for Congress in 2000. At the same time, most Americans said Clinton's impeachment should not be an issue in the presidential campaign, either.

However, by nearly 2 to 1, those who do wish to send a message to

Congress said they were less likely to re-elect a House member who voted to impeach Clinton from office, which could be significant, since Republicans cling to a mere six-seat majority in the House. With the first votes of the 2000 primary season more than a year off, and the November election a full 21 months away, the national survey of presidential preferences tended to reward name recognition above any other candidate quality.

Bush, governor of Texas and son of former President Bush, led the Republican pack with 39 percent support. Dole, the retired head of the national Red Cross and wife of 1996 GOP nominee Bob Dole, had 25 percent support. The only other candidate with double-digit backing, 17 percent, was former Vice President Dan Quayle, who formally entered the race earlier this month.

On the Democratic side, Gore had 52 percent support to 17 percent for the Rev. Jesse Jackson, a two-time presidential candidate; 11 percent for House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt of Missouri; 7 percent for former New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley; and 4 percent for Massachusetts Sen.

John F. Kerry. Of the Democrats, only Gore and Bradley are officially entered. In 2000 trial heats among registered voters, Bush led Gore 57 percent to 39 percent, and Dole beat the vice president 50 percent to 42 percent.

Not surprisingly, Gore was by far the best known of the trio, all of whom enjoyed overall positive ratings. By 49 percent to 39 percent, a plurality of voters has a good impression of the vice president, who has doggedly defended Clinton in the Monica S. Lewinsky matter. Only 12 percent had no opinion of Gore, who has lately stepped up his public profile on policy issues in preparation for a full-blown run for president. At the same time, however, Gore has emerged as a deeply polarizing figure, not withstanding his rather drab and stodgy public image.

Although 80 percent of Democratic voters and 44 percent of independents view Gore favorably, 73 percent of Republicans have an unfavorable impression of the vice president. He draws only 10 percent Republican support in a trial heat against Bush and a mere 6 percent GOP backing against

Dole.

Sixty percent of voters had a favorable impression of Bush and only 8 percent unfavorable, with about a third having no opinion of the Texas governor. Fifty-two percent had a favorable impression of Dole and 13 percent unfavorable, with 35 percent either unaware of the former Red Cross chief or expressing no opinion.

Although a potentially rough campaign lies ahead, both Bush and Dole showed potential strength as general-election candidates. In contrast to Gore's meager cross-over support, Bush managed to draw 68 percent backing from among independent voters and 23 percent from Democrats in a trial matchup with the vice president, replicating his success in Texas at building a broad coalition across party lines. Even 36 percent of self-described liberals backed Bush against Gore.

For her part, Dole managed to draw 53 percent of independents and 20 percent of Democrats in a matchup with Gore, along with 33 percent of liberals. There was no distinct gender advantage, however, for the only woman candidate known as a poten-

tial 2000 candidate. In fact, Bush actually ran stronger among women, 57 percent to 37 percent for Gore, than Dole did, 47 percent to 43 percent for the vice president.

As for the impeachment issue, although the political world seems obsessed with Clinton's fate, most Americans seem to give it far less weight. Only 5 percent of voters said it should be the most important issue in the 2000 presidential race. Twenty-nine percent said it should be an issue, but not the most important one, and 64 percent said it should not be an issue at all.

Opinions differed somewhat among partisans, however, similar to the larger division over Clinton and his fitness to remain in office. Seventy-eight percent of Democratic voters said impeachment should have no place in the 2000 campaign, along with 61 percent of independents. But half of Republicans said impeachment should be an issue, with 12 percent calling it the most important issue.

As for congressional contests, 52 percent of voters said a vote to convict Clinton and remove him from office would have no effect on who they

back for the U.S. Senate next year. Twenty-six percent said they would be less likely to support a senator who votes to convict the president and 17 percent said more likely. Fifty-four percent said a vote against Clinton's removal would have no effect. Twenty-two percent said they would be more likely to support a senator who votes against impeachment and 20 percent were less likely.

In House races, 49 percent of the electorate said a vote to impeach Clinton would have no effect on how they vote next year. But nearly a third, 31 percent, said they would be less likely to re-elect a House member who voted to impeach and 16 percent said more likely.

The Times Poll interviewed 960 adults nationwide, including 817 registered voters, Wednesday through Friday. Among registered voters, 203 were self-described Republicans and 298 were self-described Democrats. For registered voters the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points; for Democrats and Republicans it is 6 points.

Scientists say AIDS virus came from chimps

By David Brown,
The Washington Post

CHICAGO _ A team of scientists believes it has traced the origin of the AIDS virus to a subspecies of chimpanzees in equatorial West Africa that has been harboring an ancestral version of the microbe for several hundred thousand years.

For more than 15 years, evidence has pointed to Africa as the birthplace of the virus. For nearly as long, virologists have believed human beings acquired it from primates. The new research narrows the microbe's place of origin to the region near the countries of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon, on the Atlantic Coast. The research sheds no light

on the mystery of when or how the virus leaped the "species barrier," although genetic analysis suggests such an event occurred at least three times. It may, however, shed light on more practical and clinically relevant questions.

That is because preliminary evidence suggests the subspecies of chimpanzees, Pan troglodytes, does not become ill from the ancestral virus. If further study proves that is the case, the animals might help illuminate why the microbe is so deadly to their human cousins, who are 98 percent identical to them. "We want to focus on the naturally infected animals ... and study them side-by-side with humans looking at a number of immunological parameters," said

Beatrice H. Hahn of the University of Alabama at Birmingham. "That might give us a clue as to why we get sick."

Hahn, who did the research with her colleague Feng Gao and 10 other researchers, presented the findings at the Sixth Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections that opened here Saturday and runs through Thursday. The conference is a smaller, more focused version of the international AIDS meetings, held every two years. It was started when it became evident the international meeting would never again be held in the United States because of possible restrictions on admission of HIV-positive foreign visitors to the country.

In tracing the origin of the AIDS virus, Hahn's team compared the ge-

netic sequence of human immunodeficiency virus 1 (HIV-1), which causes AIDS in humans, and simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV), which often, but not always, causes a similar disease in primates. The SIV strain the researchers studied was SIVcpz, the last three letters denoting chimpanzee. Other strains infect other primates, such as African green monkeys.

Only four samples of SIVcpz have ever been examined. The scientists determined that three were closely related, differing from each other by 9 to 13 percent of their genetic base sequence, or fingerprint. The fourth had about twice as many differences. This suggested there were two SIV "lines of descent" in chimpanzees.

Each line had a common ancestor, but over time had drifted apart through evolution. The researchers then looked at the animals' genetic relationship to each other.

Using mitochondrial DNA, a substance passed exclusively from mother to offspring, scientists determined that the three animals with the closely related viruses were also closely related to each other. They were all members of the P. troglodytes subspecies. The one with the more different virus was of the P. troglodytes schweinfurthii, which is genetically distinct and geographically separate from P. troglodytes. The researchers then looked at HIV-1, which occurs in three groups, denoted M, O and N.

Group M accounts for the vast ma-

jority of the world's AIDS infections. O is a rare type, found so far only in Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon. Group N is a type discovered last year in Cameroon. All three groups bear closest resemblance, genetically speaking, to the strain SIVcpz found in the P. troglodytes. Hahn and her colleagues concluded that all human AIDS viruses must have come from that subspecies of chimpanzee, and the transmission must have occurred at least three times, once each for M, O and N viruses.

Despite their endangered status, chimpanzees are hunted for food in west and central Africa. Hahn said the next task is to find a way to determine the prevalence of SIVcpz among wild populations.

Probe places blame in Diana death on driver

By John-Thor Dahlburg,
Los Angeles Times

PARIS _ Nearly 17 months after Princess Diana's death, two French magistrates completed a painstaking investigation Friday that is believed to lay the bulk of blame on the drunk, speeding driver of her Mercedes.

The probe, the most meticulous ever of an auto accident in France, turned up no trace of a white Fiat Uno that apparently brushed against Diana's limousine right before the accident, according to numerous press leaks. Nor was any proof found to support repeated claims by the billionaire father of Diana's boyfriend, Dodi Fayed, who also died in the accident, that the crash in a tunnel by the Seine River was the result of a plot against the British princess and her Muslim companion.

Nine media photographers and a media agency motorcyclist who had

been pursuing the princess are still under investigation on possible criminal charges of manslaughter and failing to aid the victims of an accident. They were questioned by Investigating Magistrate Herve Stephan for a final time Friday.

Initial suppositions were that the paparazzi might have caused or contributed to the accident by crowding limousine driver Henri Paul, the third person killed in the Aug. 31, 1997, crash. Yet autopsies showed that Paul, a security guard at the Ritz Hotel, had been drinking heavily and taking antidepressant drugs. It was recently discovered that one of the photographers, Fabrice Chassery, had made three calls on the day of the accident to the owner of the car rental firm that had furnished the Mercedes. According to investigators, Stephan wanted to determine if the photographers had been tipped off in advance about the princess' route.

All parties in the case, including the families of the victims and the crash's sole survivor, bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones, now have 20 days to ask Stephan and the second investigating magistrate, Marie-Christine Devidal, to make additional inquiries.

Any potential trials are still months away, the Paris prosecutor's office said in a media release Friday. The prosecutors will have three months to study the magistrates' report, which runs to 5,000 pages with legal annexes, before asking that charges be brought. Whatever their request, it will be up to Stephan and Devidal to decide whether to send any of the photographers before a court.

Officials at the Ritz, which is owned by Fayed's father, Mohammed, assigned Paul to chauffeur Diana and Fayed although he did not have the special driver's license required for the Mercedes limousine. According to extensive leaks on the

investigation that have appeared in the British media, Stephan believes that one or two of the paparazzi traveling on speeding motorbikes may have indirectly contributed to the accident by pulling alongside the Mercedes as Paul neared or entered the tunnel.

The mysterious Fiat, which never turned up despite an extensive search by French police, is also believed to have been a factor in the wreck, but to what degree may never be known.

Stephan reportedly recommended that manslaughter charges be dropped against the photographers but that three of them be prosecuted for the less-serious offense of failing to come to the aid of Diana and the other occupants of the car. One of the paparazzi, Romuald Rat, has admitted opening the door of the car and taking Diana's pulse as she lay dying.

Shop managers at pet superstore cited for animal cruelty

By Tom Jackman,
The Washington Post

Four managers of a suburban Virginia Petco store have been charged with animal cruelty after local animal wardens repeatedly found dirty conditions and dehydrated animals, including some dead lizards, inside the store, authorities said.

Fairfax County Animal Control Department officials visited the store in the Baileys Crossroads neighborhood after receiving a complaint in December. "They had some animals that were extremely dehydrated," said Connie Harrington, an Animal Control spokeswoman. "Some lizards were dead, the birds were overcrowded, and the work areas were filthy."

An officer instructed employees to clean the store and provide better care for the animals, but she didn't issue any summonses. But several days

later, the situation hadn't improved, so the officer charged three store managers and the district manager for the pet superstore with failing to adequately care for the creatures.

Several days later, Harrington said, another person complained about the same store. Another officer visited and cited the store managers again for failing to properly care for a canary and a parakeet. "It is highly unusual" for a pet store to be cited once, much less twice, Harrington said.

Officials at Petco headquarters in San Diego noted that only the employees, not the company, had been charged. "To the best of our knowledge we have never been cited in a case like this," said Don Cowan, a Petco spokesman. "We believe the charges against the employees are unfounded. ... Our concern has been and continues to be with animals in our care and for our employees."

Secret Courts' 'roving wiretaps' used to hunt terrorism suspects

By Vernon Loeb,
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON _ As President Clinton proposes massive funding increases for counterterrorism, federal law enforcement agencies already have received substantial new legal authority to fight suspected terrorists with "roving" wiretaps and secret court orders for tracing telephone calls and obtaining business records.

The expanded powers, high on the FBI's legislative wish list for years, were passed by Congress last fall as part of the intelligence authorization act. Michael Woods, chief of the FBI's national security law unit, said this week that "any one of these extremely valuable tools could be the keystone of a successful operation" against sophisticated foreign terrorists and intelligence operatives.

But the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other privacy

rights activists oppose the expanded law enforcement powers as unwarranted attacks on the Fourth Amendment, which bars unreasonable searches and seizures, and say the changes were enacted by an intelligence conference committee without public hearings and almost no debate.

Neil J. Gallagher, the FBI's assistant director for national security, said the expanded powers can only be exercised with court approval. "We have to go to court and present the facts," Gallagher said. "It is not as though the FBI is using intrusive techniques" on its own authority.

"Roving wiretaps" enable the government to eavesdrop on calls made by a suspect from multiple phones. Although legal authority for the wiretaps has existed since 1986, the courts have allowed few such intercepts because a standard requires the government to prove a suspect is intentionally thwarting a conventional wiretap by frequently changing phones. The new

"roving wiretap" provision, applicable in all criminal investigations and not limited for use against terrorist suspects, removes "intent" from the legal standard and requires the government to show only that a target's use of multiple phones has the "effect" of preventing interception.

Other new provisions for obtaining business records and tracing telephone calls amend a little-known statute called the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). The law, passed 21 years ago, established a secret federal court to approve wiretap requests made by the Justice Department against suspected foreign terrorists and intelligence agents without probable cause that a crime has been committed. Secret FISA wiretaps, search warrants and orders can be used against U.S. citizens only in cases where the government can show there is a reason to believe that an American is engaged in espionage or terrorism on behalf of a foreign power.

With the rise of international terrorism, the FISA framework has become a major source of information for intelligence-gathering and evidence for law enforcement. A secret FISA search warrant was granted in March 1995 to search a New York apartment building inhabited by members of Aum Shinrikyo, the Japanese religious cult that unleashed a sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway system, even though its followers were not suspected of any crime in the United States. Critical evidence in both the World Trade Center bombing case and the Aldrich H. Ames spy case also came from warrants and wiretaps granted under FISA.

Today, the secret FISA court grants more wiretaps than all other federal courts nationwide in criminal cases. In 1997, the FISA court approved 749 wiretaps; all other federal courts approved 569 wiretaps, federal records show. FISA wiretaps have doubled since the last year of the Bush admin-

istration, records show.

One of the new FISA provisions passed by Congress last year would enable the Justice Department to obtain from the secret court an order that would allow agents to obtain the telephone numbers of all incoming and outgoing calls on any lines used or called by suspected foreign agents or terrorists. The other new FISA provision enables the Justice Department to obtain records from airlines, bus companies, rental car outlets, storage facilities, hotels and motels used by any suspected foreign agent or terrorist.

Kate Martin, director of the Center for National Security Studies, said expanding the government's power under FISA to fight foreign terrorist threats in the United States dangerously blurs the line between intelligence-gathering and law enforcement, especially when individuals charged as spies and terrorists have no way to challenge the underlying issuance of

FISA warrants and wiretaps used to gather evidence against them.

"They're vastly expanding the traditional nature of what is a foreign intelligence investigation, and that threatens civil liberties in my view," she said. "They're trying to put under foreign intelligence matters that should be handled under the criminal code. We've already been down that road with disastrous consequences."

The ACLU, in its analysis, opposed all three provisions, but the "roving" wiretap amendment topped its list. The provision "would not only lower the evidentiary standard for a roving wiretap order, it would also allow the tapping of any phone near the subject at any time the order is in effect. This includes the telephones in the private residences of a subject's friends, neighbors and business associates."