

Close race spurs talk of possible split vote

by Scott Martelle
Los Angeles Times

Remember those grade-school democracy lessons about whoever gets the most votes wins?

As lyricist Ira Gershwin once wrote, "It ain't necessarily so."

Here in the waning days of the 2000 presidential campaign, political analysts are weighing scenarios under which Texas Gov. George W. Bush could rack up more votes nationwide than Vice President Al Gore but still lose the election. It hasn't happened in more than a century. Still, it is possible.

"This has been a constitutional crisis waiting to happen," said Jeff Manza, a sociology professor and political analyst at Chicago's Northwestern University.

Under the Electoral College system, established in the Constitution, none of us actually votes for a candidate for president. Instead, we're voting for slates of electors committed to supporting their political party's nominee.

The electors for the winning candidate assemble in the state capitols on Dec. 18, where ballots are cast for president and vice president and forwarded to the president of the Senate, in this case, Al Gore, where they are counted on Jan. 6.

Only about half the states legally require the electors to support the top vote-getter. In California, a wayward elector can be fined \$1,000 and sent to prison for up to 3 years.

In Michigan, a battleground state that some analysts think could swing the election, a vote for Gore is actually a vote for David P. Taylor and 17 fellow Democratic loyalists.

Taylor, a lawyer, said he would have no misgivings about playing a role in a Gore electoral victory in defiance of the popular vote. But he said he could see where many voters would not be pleased.

"It might be difficult for the average person to accept that, but I don't think it's of revolutionary importance," said Taylor. "People should be aware of how it (Electoral College) works and then if they say this isn't the way we should elect the president, changes might be made."

Such a split result has happened only twice.

In 1888, Grover Cleveland won 48.6 percent of the popular vote but lost in the Electoral College to Benjamin Harrison, who received just 47.8 percent. In 1876, Rutherford B. Hayes lost the popular vote to Samuel Tilden Smith, who received 51 percent of the vote. But Hayes prevailed by a single electoral vote, the closest margin ever.

The system was designed by the framers of the Constitution who sought a compromise between those who advocated direct election of the president by the masses and those who wanted Congress to pick the president.

Under the system, each state is allotted electoral votes equal to the number of congressional districts in the state, plus one more for each of the two U.S. senators. The District of Columbia has three electors.

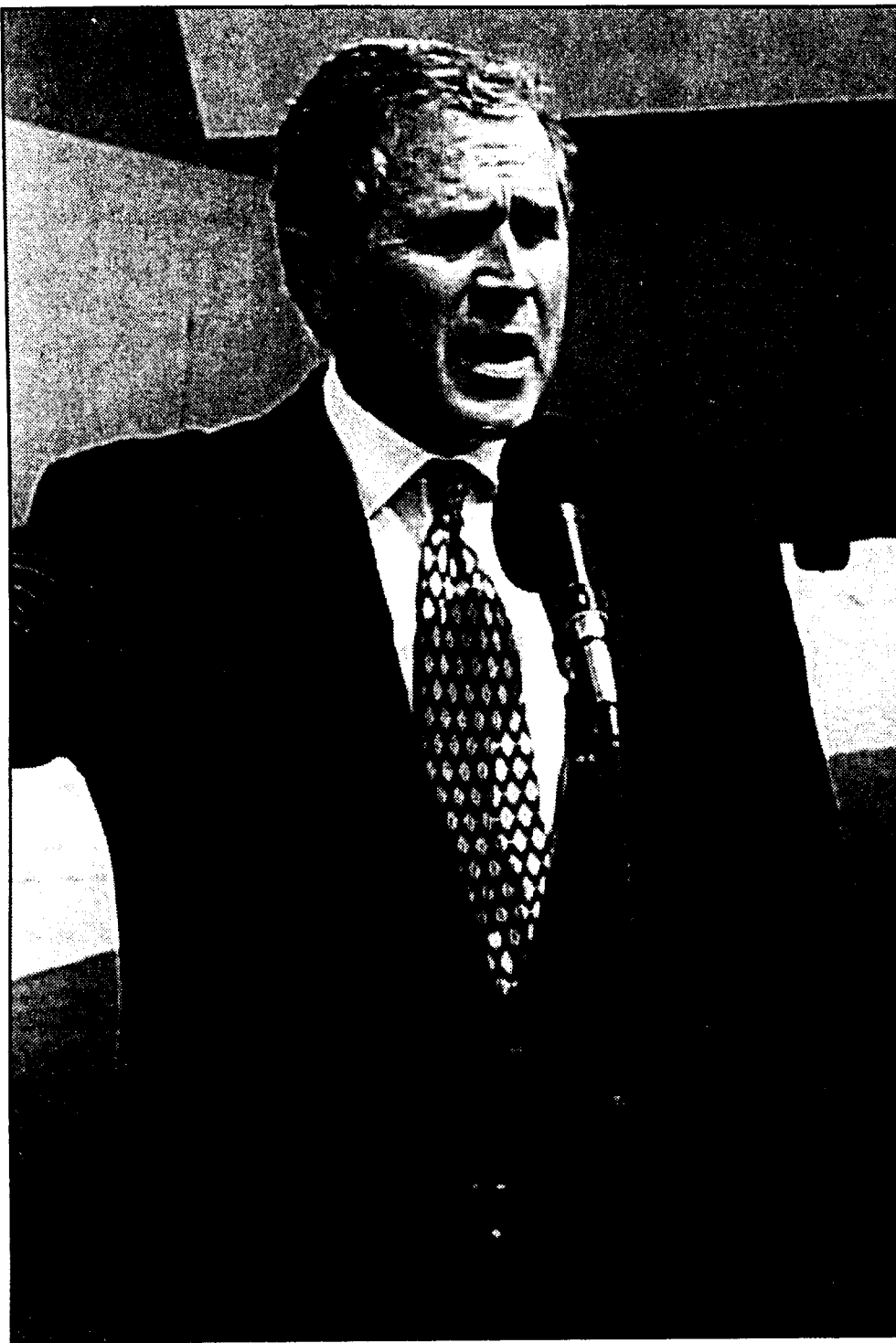
In all states but Maine and Nebraska, whoever wins the popular vote gets all the electoral votes. Maine and Nebraska give two at-large electoral votes to the state winner but award the others based on whoever wins in each congressional district.

It takes 270 electoral votes (out of 538) to win. Gore has done well in a few big states, such as California and New York, while Bush has led polls in many states with smaller populations. Big margins of victory for Bush in those states, combined with thin victories for Gore in big states could give Bush the most votes, even if Gore gets the most electors.

Not all analysts see the numbers going that way, though.

"It's conceivable, but I'm not going to bet my kids' Christmas presents on it," said Bob Beckel, a former campaign manager for Democrat Walter Mondale. "I really don't see it in the calculations."

Also improbable, experts say, is a tie. When no one candidate receives a majority of electoral votes, the House of Representatives elects the winner from among the three top electoral finalists. Each state gets one vote.



They're serious now

Bush's attacks on Gore among his most direct yet

by Monica Davey
and Rick Pearson
October 24, 2000
Chicago Tribune

CINCINNATI—For a political "barnstorm," it was awfully quiet.

Gov. George Ryan of Illinois and the governors of three other states sat Monday in a mostly vacant room in the basement of a school that's under renovation here.

Taped on the wall behind them were two red-white-and-blue signs promoting the "Barnstorm for Reform" tour that Texas Gov. George W. Bush launched this week, sending 28 fellow Republican governors in teams to different parts of the country to whip up excitement for his presidential bid.

But for this team of governors dispatched to an Ohio basement, the local television news cameras had to leave before any of the four out-of-town governors had a chance to speak. And the local radio reporter had a deadline pretty soon, the governors were advised, so they might want to talk fast.

Aside from two other reporters, a few local Republican notables, the school's officials and the governors' entourages, the governors of Illinois, Virginia, Tennessee, and Wyoming made speeches in support of Bush's plans for education to a room of empty chairs.

"We're out to talk about the programs that are important to us, the states, local control," Ryan said, after touring this city's Marva Collins Preparatory School. "Send the money back home. Let us decide how it should be spent at home, not some bureaucrat or some operation in Washington, D.C."

Before their speeches, the four toured the school, which is named for famed Chicago educator Marva Collins and based on her philosophies. They watched students in uniforms do math problems. Several students stood before the governors and recited poems about character, achievement and responsibility.

Bush "wants to promote what your kids talked about here today -- character development," Ryan said in his speech.

Asked why so few ordinary voters had been invited to hear them, the governors indicated that the "Barnstorm" tour strategy was aimed mainly at attracting reporters. "We're hoping the media will spread our story," Tennessee Gov. Don Sundquist said.

In the only real hint of fanfare here, about a dozen people did turn up on the street outside the school's gate just before the governors arrived. But they were supporters of Vice President Al Gore and made their own speeches for the television cameras. One of the Gore supporters tried to come inside but was told the governors' event was private.

Bush, who joined a different team of the "barnstorming" Republican governors in Kansas City, Mo., attracted much more notice on Monday.

Bush offered a vigorous defense of his plans for education, Social Security and tax cuts and aggressively attacked Gore as a candidate for "obstacle-in-chief" who represents the status quo.

Bush contended the Democratic administration under President Clinton and Gore "has blocked reform at every turn."

"It came in with ringing promises and is now leaving with a sigh," Bush said of the administration, mocking Gore's propensity to utter audible sighs during the first presidential debate. "This is the Gore approach: no innovation, no imagination, no flexibility, no accountability."

Bush has criticized Gore for using scare tactics in trying to motivate seniors to the polls on the issue of Social Security's fate, engaged in some of his own fear-mongering. Bush said the vice president would leave a \$40 trillion debt in the Social Security trust fund that would require a massive payroll tax increase or major benefit cut in 15 years.

Bush's attacks on Gore were among his most direct yet at the vice president as the presidential campaign entered its critical final two weeks with national surveys showing a tight race. "This is a close election but I can feel the spirit of the people. The people are behind me," Bush told a rally at an ink manufacturer in Des Moines, Iowa. For Bush, who closed out the day in Milwaukee, the campaign's efforts were focused on reaching out to independents in Missouri, Iowa and Wisconsin.

On Tuesday, Bush visits Thomas Middle School in Arlington Heights as the Republican presidential campaign reconsiders its strategy for Illinois, a state once all but conceded to Gore but where Republicans feel they are making gains.

But Ryan won't be there. He'll be in Ohio and then West Virginia, campaigning some more with other governors.

Gore uses Texas education study to bolster his school plan

by James Warren
October 26, 2000
TMS Campus

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Vice President Al Gore on Wednesday seized upon a think tank study raising doubts about improvements in Texas public education, using it to contend that Texas Gov. George W. Bush is given to "nice-sounding rhetoric and a few half-measures" on education.

Gore highlighted an area of clear difference between the presidential candidates during a speech on his own education proposals at Tennessee State University, obviously re-crafted to address Tuesday's release of a Rand Corp. study questioning Bush-heralded academic gains in Texas.

Though Gore appeared to take some rhetorical liberties in citing the Rand study, the report does suggest a clear gap between Texas students' performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills and on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

In particular, Rand maintained that the gap between performance of white and minority students in reading and math has grown slightly, compared to the Texas test results indicating the gap has narrowed among 4th- and 8th-graders.

Rand suggested that one explanation for the dichotomy might be that Texas teachers were "teaching to the test," namely prepping some students for the statewide exam.

Bush aides have said the new Rand study contradicts every non-partisan scientific evaluation of the gains made by Texas students, including a Rand study issued in July.

Gore's education address had been planned, but he added swipes at Bush, using the Rand study. At the same time the Democratic National Committee produced and aired a television advertisement with a similar thrust based on the Rand study.

It was a reflection of a tight race in which both sides desperately seek any advantage, on virtually any issue or development that might influence voters.

"My opponent says we can trust him to raise standards and results because he's done it in Texas," Gore told a small gathering of students. He often cites the Rand Corp. to prove his point. But this week, Rand issued a new study, a comprehensive one.

"The study reported that contrary to all we've been told, the achievement gap for Texas students has not narrowed, it has widened. The study called the claim that the achievement gap was closing in Texas, and I quote, 'false.'"

A spokesman for Rand noted that the study did not use the word "false" but did use "inflated" and "misleading." A Rand press release did say that certain features of the Texas test "may contribute to the false sense that the racial gaps are closing."

The Rand spokesman quibbled, too, with the characterization of the study as "comprehensive" and also said that Gore's reference to the student dropout rate increasing in Texas came not from the Rand study but a separate, non-Rand study referred to in the Rand report.

Nevertheless, the substantial differences in education policy between Gore and Bush were underscored. In sum, Gore would spend more on public education, opposes vouchers, would be more inclined to testing teachers and would offer more in tax breaks for college tuition.

The federal role in education, as has often been noted, is modest and education remains one of the most localized elements of American government. Yet the candidates know that interest in the topic is also one of the few that routinely cuts across all age, racial and economic lines.

Gore's morning began early, at a Nashville fire station where he held the third in what are now daily "kitchen table" chats with supposedly "real people."

He chatted about the economy and education with the firefighters and, asked what he had ever done for such workers, responded that he labored in Congress to pass a "two in, two out rule" to require departments to have two firefighters outside a fire when two firefighters go inside.

After the education speech, Gore attended a rally at the Jackson County (Tenn.) Fairgrounds. The appearance was another measure of a need to firm up support in his home state, which threatens to go for Bush and where Gore found time to raise about \$4 million Tuesday at various functions.