

Bush and Gore campaigns getting in gear for fall fight

By Calvin Woodward
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — So much for shaded policy disagreements. Starker choices loom for voters — on abortion, taxes, Social Security and more — now that Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W. Bush are preparing to go head to head for the presidency.

Even when the rhetoric of both candidates seems to match, policy experts see contrasts that are likely to be magnified and be of practical consequence for the nation's future, not to mention pocketbooks.

"This is in some ways as profound an ideological difference as there has been since Reagan and Carter in 1980 — if you dig into it," said Michael Franc, vice president for government relations at the conservative Heritage Foundation.

Digging is required because the vice president, a self-styled pragmatic "reinventer" of government, and the Texas governor, a "compassionate conservative," can sound alike when they are not speaking to the ideological wings of their parties.

On health care, for one issue, Gore proposes changes that are modest by comparison with those of his vanquished Democratic rival and modest, too, alongside the grand vision of universal

health care abandoned by the administration he serves.

But his plan is much more ambitious and expensive than anything Bush has put on the table.

For his part, Bush proposes across-the-board tax cuts larger even than the congressional Republican package that Democrats attacked as too costly last year. Gore offers selective tax relief here and there.

As well, Bush stands for partial privatization of Social Security, proposes expanded medical savings accounts and spells out a way for parents whose kids are in failing schools to use federal money for private education — ideas roundly opposed by the vice president.

Those ideas have simmered in Congress for a decade but only now are emerging with force in a presidential campaign. On the Republican side, Franc argues, that sets the governor apart from Bob Dole campaign in 1996 and President Bush in 1992.

"A lot of conservative thinking that might have been trendy or outside the envelope in the early '90s is now much more widely accepted," he said Thursday.

Because the ground has shifted, "I see Bush as being to the right of Dole, to the right of his dad," he said.

Al From, president of the cen-

trist Democratic Leadership Council, said the differences between Gore and Bush are more pronounced than might have been expected from two men who share a moderate impulse.

From contends that Bush built his centrist message "on the cheap," without the painstaking and often painful policy work that helped Bill Clinton move his party beyond its old orthodoxy in 1992. That left Bush ill-equipped to stay in the center when the primaries got rough, he said.

"Clinton built his own philosophical base in the party that he could fall back on when he got in trouble," From said. "Because Bush didn't do that, he had to fall back on the people who were the establishment."

As a result, he said, Gore can draw vivid differences with Bush on some of the social and economic issues where they might otherwise have been closer.

When Gore's opponent was Bill Bradley and Bush's main rival was John McCain, policy differences tended to be minor or else overshadowed by debate over character, veracity, tactics and — for Republicans — religion.

Despite all the heat about abortion, Bush and McCain espoused similar positions on one side of the issue; Gore and Bradley did the same on the other.

McCain and Bradley take parting shots as they exit election spotlight

By Ron Fournier
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Falling as swiftly as they soared, John McCain and Bill Bradley abandoned their presidential races Thursday and chided their triumphant rivals on the way out. "Millions of Americans have rallied to our banner," McCain said as both candidates sought to leverage the support they had earned.

The Arizona senator pledged to press his case for political reform and warned that Republicans will "slip into the mists of history" without it. McCain, who pulled swarms of Democrats and independents into GOP contests, offered nominee-in-waiting George W. Bush his "best wishes" — but not his endorsement.

An hour before McCain bowed out, Bradley told reporters he would support Vice President Al Gore, but he also accused his fellow Democrat of "distortions" in their primary fight. "I hope that he will run a better campaign in the general election," said the former New Jersey senator, who was unable to win any primary or caucus.

Still, it was a triumphant day for the political establishment that backed Bush and Gore, both of whom vanquished their rivals after stiff challenges. "When you do battle with entrenched power ... it's very difficult," Bradley said.

Within minutes of McCain's announcement, Bush's team was reaching out to McCain intermediaries in an effort to mend fences. The rivals themselves spoke briefly by telephone but settled nothing.

"John needs some time to think, and I need some time," Bush said.

Said to be still seething at the Texas governor, McCain is in no hurry to make peace. He planned

to take a week's vacation before determining what leverage he has with Bush and what he might want to achieve with it, said a McCain adviser.

McCain knows he is not bargaining from a strong position, but the adviser said his boss wants to somehow keep his signature issue — campaign finance reform — on the political agenda.

With that goal in mind, McCain quit the race but didn't shut down his campaign — a technicality that keeps his options open in case he wants to make things uncomfortable for Bush, who needs McCain's endorsement to unify the party.

McCain's options, according to the adviser, include: barnstorming the country to promote campaign finance reform, leading a platform fight at the Republican National Convention or even mounting a third-party presidential bid. Aides say that last option is remote.

McCain himself has ruled out bolting the GOP and said Thursday, "I love my home." He did, however, leave himself a loophole by saying in his departure speech that the party deserves "the allegiance of none" if it doesn't embrace campaign finance reform.

One of McCain's top supporters said he urged the senator to let go of the enmity he feels toward Bush. "There's no question that there's some bitterness there and some anger," said Sen. Charles Hagel, R-Neb.

McCain was the 10th Republican to leave the race. Bradley has been Gore's only challenger. Both could not sustain momentum against the sheer force of their rivals' organizations.

McCain had the most potent insurgency, staggering Bush in New Hampshire and Michigan.

In a testament to his drawing power, one of every four GOP primary participants had never before voted in a Republican contest.

Their paths cleared, Bush and Gore warmed up for what both camps predict will be a negative campaign.

The Texas governor criticized Gore for supporting a ban on unlimited, unregulated donations while raising the so-called "soft money" himself.

Using a line he unleashed against McCain in their primary battles, Bush said of the vice president, "We're not going to be fooled by somebody who says one thing and absolutely does another."

Gore reissued his challenge to forsake TV ads in the general election. "We can elevate our democracy," he told reporters here.

Neither Bradley nor Gore made clean exits.

The Democrat did not release his delegates, saying they had earned a voice at the national convention. He has 412 delegates — more than 1,000 behind Gore.

On his way out of the race, Bradley said he will help elect Gore and "continue to work for a new politics and for the values I laid out in the campaign." He said those values include campaign finance reform and politics that is honest, positive, compassionate and ruled by convictions, not polls. Aides said Bradley, 56, may well run again.

McCain left more room for doubt by suspending his campaign. The tactic may allow him to collect his full allotment of federal campaign funds, including convention expenses. He also retained control of his 231 delegates, a fraction of the 1,034 needed for nomination.

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