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Florida

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based on the recount and violates what this court has ruled ... which is to accept those results unless she has good reason not to, then we will be back in court," said a new member of Gore's massive legal team, David Boies.

With Harris' announcement, the battle lines were clearly drawn: Bush's team says the manual recounts are conducted with no set standards in Democratic-leaning counties with the sole purpose of pushing Gore ahead. The vice president's team argues that the painstaking process is the only way to ensure that every Florida voter is heard.

The next pivot points will be when overseas ballots are counted, with results due by midnight Friday, and when Harris is confronted with the recount totals that could threaten Bush's lead.

The race tumbled to the courts after a statewide machine recount trimmed Bush's lead from 1,784 votes to a few hundred, prompting Gore to push for painstaking manual recounts and Bush to fight them in courts of law and public opinion.

Officials in two counties tabulated ballots by hand Tuesday, with action in two other jurisdictions pending.

Shoving matches and shouting fits punctuated the action inside and outside Florida's courtrooms. Jeb Bush said things were getting "nerve-racking" throughout his state.

"I can't even walk around outside now," he said at a town hall meeting 60 miles northwest of Tallahassee.

President Clinton weighed in from Air Force One, telling AP reporters he hopes the dispute doesn't lead to a presidency crippled by controversy.

"I think it's too soon to say that bitterness and partisanship will paralyze the next president," Clinton said as he flew from Hawaii to Brunei. "We don't know that."

With the razor-thin lead in ballots counted so far, Baker said presiden-

tial candidate Bush would accept the results of manual recounts collected by close of business Tuesday and the overseas absentee ballots due in Friday. Both sides would also drop their dueling lawsuits, Baker said.

"It would give us some degree of finality," Baker told reporters. "When is it going to end? I ask you, when is it going to end?"

"It truly was not a proposal," sniffed Gore campaign chairman William Daley during a visit to Capitol Hill to calm Democratic leaders. "It was strictly, in my opinion, an in-

“I think it's too soon to say that bitterness and partisanship will paralyze the next president.”

President Clinton

accurate description of the laws of Florida. The laws of Florida will be determined by the courts."

If any Democrats were jittery about the course Gore was steering for the party, they appeared to benefit from hand-holding on Tuesday by Daley.

"The support of the caucus is solid," said House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, even as Democrats said privately they would reassess after final overseas ballots are counted Friday.

Bush's team has heard some complaints from Republicans who want him to be more aggressive in courts and in the media.

"There's a sense of helplessness, that we're watching an American presidential election being stolen right out from under our nose and nothing's being done to stop it," said Rusty Paul, former Georgia GOP chairman.

Both Bush and Gore were lying low. Gore called for calm on Monday but declined to field reporters' questions. Bush monitored the legal fight from his ranch in Texas for a third straight day and expected to talk to journalists Wednesday.

The presidents-in-waiting are trying to strike a balance between their desire to be seen as prepared

— and a fear that they will appear overeager.

Gore leads in the nationwide popular vote by just 200,000 votes out of 100 million cast, but the Electoral College tally is so close that whoever takes Florida almost certainly will win the White House. Only three times in the nation's history has a candidate won the popular vote but lost the presidential race, the last time in 1888.

Not counting Florida, Bush carried 29 states for 246 electoral votes. Gore counted 19 states plus the District of Columbia for 262 electoral votes, with 270 needed for victory. Gore led in New Mexico but the state remained too close to call.

Republicans have talked about challenging Gore's victories in close-voting states other than Florida, but the tactic would be a long shot. A new poll Tuesday said voters believe the results of the recount in Florida should determine the next president.

The Bush campaign has said for days it would accept the results of absentee ballots and those certified by Tuesday. Baker threw in the manual counts in a further effort to portray Bush as the only candidate who wanted the issue resolved quickly.

He said Bush was taking a risk because manual counts could erode his lead. But Republicans have closely monitored the recount process and knew there was little chance that Gore could overtake the Texan by Tuesday night.

"That's like offering sleeves from his vest," Christopher cracked.

Christopher appealed to the public's sense of fair play.

"I see a yearning in the country for the vote to be correctly counted, and I think we're going down that path. That's what I see the country most interested in," he said.

Shortly after Harris' announcement, Bush spokeswoman Karen Hughes told a news conference that the Gore drive "cannot possibly result in a fair and accurate count of the votes." Gore spokesman Chris Lehane said hand counting is the only way to "make sure the will of the people is reflected."

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