

President venerates soldiers

MESA, Ariz. — President Bush promised World War II veterans a Washington memorial that "will stand for the ages" and paid Memorial Day tribute to America's fallen soldiers before embarking on a three-day West Coast swing to try to ease his political problems in California.

Electricity shortages in the nation's most populous state have pitted the Republican president against Democratic Gov. Gray Davis in a high-stakes game of blame shifting. Advisers for both men prepared for a Tuesday meeting, when Davis plans to stage a showdown over energy price caps.

Arriving in Los Angeles, Bush was greeted by a delegation of GOP elected officials including Secretary of State Bill Jones, the only Republican to hold statewide office. Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan gave Bush a cowboy hat, which he donned and then placed over his heart.

For most of the day, however, Bush focused on U.S. veterans — and the solemn ceremonies in two states honoring those who never returned from America's wars.

"Their losses can be marked, but not measured," Bush said at the tradi-

tional Memorial Day ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery. "We can never measure the full value of what was gained in their sacrifice."

Bush also laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns.

Later he traveled to Mesa, Ariz., to pay tribute to veterans at the Champlin Fighter Aircraft Museum. He asked the crowd to observe a nationwide moment of silence at 3 p.m. Arizona time.

"Any foe who might challenge our national resolve will be repeating the grave error of defeated adversaries," the president said. "Because this nation loves peace, we do not take it for granted."

He was accompanied by Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi and Rep. J.D. Hayworth, R-Ariz., but not one of the nation's best-known veterans: Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona. The former presidential rival of Bush was in Ireland meeting with foreign leaders, said Nancy Ives, a McCain spokeswoman.

Bush opened the day at the White House, where he signed legislation to construct a World War II monument on the National Mall, a setting criti-

cized by some who say it would break up the vista.

Standing in front of an American flag and a portrait of George Washington, the president said the monument between the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial "will stand for the ages."

Bush has said World War II veterans are dying at a rate of 1,100 each day, leaving no time to waste on the project.

The California trip promised to be a rancorous one because the state is engulfed in an energy crisis and Bush has refused to cap wholesale electricity prices as Davis requested.

Bush has blamed California's shortages on state officials, and he argues that price caps won't solve shortages.

Davis, a potential presidential candidate in 2004, has accused Bush of ignoring the state. The president has visited 29 states, but not California, since taking office.

They meet Tuesday, and neither side expects a resolution of the political feud.

The Associated Press



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