



## Legislature poised for special session

BY BILL KACZOR  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — The Republican-controlled Legislature is poised to hold a special session Wednesday to try to enforce George W. Bush's certified victory in Florida by naming the state's 25 electors, the House majority leader said.

But Senate President John McKay said he isn't ready to sign a proclamation convening the session despite House Majority Leader Mike Fasano's statement Saturday afternoon that both leaders would do so on Monday.

"There are so many uncertainties contingent upon actions outside the control of the Legislature that we must proceed with the utmost caution," McKay said in a statement. "This is perhaps the most important issue that the Legislature will ever face. The Senate will not be rushed to judgment. We have only one chance to get this right."

House Speaker Tom Feeney has said he is ready to call for the session, and Fasano said the speaker told him a proclamation would be signed Monday.

The Republican-controlled Legislature is considering appointing the 25 electors through a

resolution that would spare Gov. Jeb Bush from having to sign legislation helping his brother.

Republican Sen. Jim King said there were preliminary discussions with Fasano in which different potential schedules for a special session were discussed, and Wednesday was among the possibilities. But until McKay has a chance to study the issue, there is no set starting date, King said.

"What happened here is a colossal case of assumption," King said.

"Tom Feeney in his heart of hearts and in the marrow of his bones thinks he needs to take action. John McKay in the marrow of his bones says, 'I am going to be deliberative, this is the most important thing the Florida legislature has ever done.'"

Republican lawmakers argued the Constitution makes the legislature responsible for naming electors and requires them to do so if there's a chance the state's vote might not be counted because of a controversy. Democrats disagree.

House Democratic leader Lois Frankel said she was preparing for a special session. "We have our own constitutional obligation to be there. ... We are going to be there to be voices of reason."

She said the House Rules Committee chairman,

Dudley Goodlette, had told her to report to Tallahassee on Sunday for a meeting to go over the rules for a special session.

Jeb Bush was in New York on personal business and unavailable for comment Saturday, but he previously has said he would sign legislation to help his brother become president.

Despite legislative contortions to spare him from signing over the state's 25 electoral votes to his brother, Jeb Bush's signature is required on the official certificate sending the slate of electors to the National Archives, constitutional experts said Saturday.

The Florida governor has already signed a certified slate of Republican electors. If the courts invalidate that slate, the Republican-controlled Florida Legislature is prepared to override with a Bush slate.

If Congress gets competing slates and the two chambers disagree on which to accept — a real possibility — the slate signed by Florida's governor will prevail, said Florida State University law professor Nat Stern.

University of Denver law professor Robert Hardaway, who has written a book titled "The Elec-

toral College and the Constitution: The Case for Preserving Federalism," concurred.

"The endgame scenario would seem to favor the Bush campaign," Hardaway said.

Florida's governor and Legislature would be key players in such a scenario, which would arise only if a court-ordered recount erases Bush's 537-vote lead in Florida and puts Gore ahead. If the election decision fell to Congress, the tiebreaker would be the slate signed by the governor, Hardaway and Stern said.

"I've never heard of that," Senate majority Leader Jim King said. "I hope to God we don't go that far."

Hardaway said the manner of the Legislature's selection, either a resolution or bill, would make no difference in terms of a legal challenge under federal law. Stern said he believed federal law would prevail over state law for such a challenge.

The Legislature last held a special session in January, when lawmakers took three days to pass laws making lethal injection the primary method of execution over the electric chair.

## Next president likely to confront darkening economic prospects

BY MARTIN CRUTSINGER  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Clinton might be taking more with him than his suitcase when he leaves the White House on Jan. 20. His amazing run of luck with the economy seems to be disappearing as well, right on cue with the end of his second term.

That means that his successor, either George W. Bush or Al Gore, will have to navigate stormier seas. Some forecasters are even worried about a recession next year — a problem Clinton never had to confront as he presided over a record stretch, now in its 10th year, of uninterrupted economic growth.

"However one looks at it, the economic data recently have been quite negative, and the possibility of a serious hard landing is rising," says Allen Sinai, chief economist at Decision Economics in New York.

While Sinai said he believed the chances of an outright recession — where economic growth actually contracts — are still small, he was concerned about a prolonged period of weak growth that would translate into a rising unemployment rate.

David Levy, an economist at Bard College in Chappaqua, N.Y., was even

more pessimistic, putting the odds of a full-fledged recession next year at 70 percent.

"When you put all the problems facing the economy together, it is not a pretty picture," Levy said.

Things were not supposed to turn out this way. The overwhelming view among economists had been that the United States was headed for a soft landing in which a series of interest rate increases by the Federal Reserve would slow economic growth enough to keep inflation in check without tipping the country into a recession.

But since the Nov. 7 election, while the country has been transfixed by the ballot battle in Florida, the economic ship of state has been springing leaks.

A series of government reports has shown unexpected weakness in areas ranging from consumer spending to U.S. factory orders.

The weaker economic data has added to pessimism on Wall Street, which has been on a stomach-churning ride for most of the fall. The technology-heavy Nasdaq index has lost almost half of its value since reaching record highs in March.

The concern is that the sharp fall in stock values will trigger a cutback in business investment and consumer spending, two of the major driving forces

behind the current expansion.

Clinton had the good fortune of taking office as the country was pulling out of the 1990-91 recession. That period was called the jobless recovery because even though the economy was growing again, the unemployment rate was stuck at high levels — 7.5 percent in 1992, which Clinton used with success against President Bush.

Many economists still believe the most likely outcome for 2001 will be growth of around 3 percent. Even that rate would seem lackluster compared with the 4 percent rates turned in for the past four years, the best performance since the mid-1960s.

"The economy was a good friend to the Clinton administration, and it is just not going to be as friendly to the next administration," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Economy.com, a West Chester, Pa., forecasting firm.

Bruce Steinberg, chief economist at Merrill Lynch in New York, said if the economy threatens to weaken more than the 3 percent range, the Fed can quickly step in with rate cuts to recharge consumer spending and bolster the stock market.

"If things get weak, they will react. They won't sit around twiddling their thumbs," Steinberg said.

## Election dispute might cloud lame-duck session

BY ALAN FRAM  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Amid faint hints both sides might finally be willing to settle on a budget, a lame-duck Congress and president will try again this week to settle a stubborn fight over schools, workplace safety, immigration, taxes and Medicare.

Two weeks ago, lawmakers left town hoping to return knowing whether Republican George W. Bush or Democrat Al Gore was the president-elect.

But that did not happen. And it is unclear how that will affect legislators' moods or their ability to finish their work, including four spending bills that were supposed to be complete by Oct. 1, when fiscal 2001 began.

The House planned to return to work Monday, followed a day later by the Senate.

"If the presidential thing is not wrapped up, I don't think we'll get very far," House Majority Leader Dick Army, R-Texas, said last week.

The biggest fights are over a \$350 billion measure for education, health, and labor programs containing a record \$18 billion increase over last year; a GOP effort to block administration rules, already issued, that are aimed at preventing workplace injuries; and a White House plan to help more than 1 million

immigrants stay in this country.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., said he expects President Clinton will meet with the congressional leadership this week to discuss issues for the lame-duck session, but said nothing has been scheduled.

Hastert, in an interview Saturday after meeting with Bush in Texas, indicated a willingness to make minor changes in a tax cut bill the president has threatened to veto, saying any modifications could be inserted into an unrelated spending bill.

The tax cut bill for health care costs and some businesses also contains a \$1 increase in the \$5.15 hourly minimum wage. Clinton says it is too generous to small businesses.

Some say with the distraction of the presidential election and time running out on both the 106th Congress and Clinton's presidency, there is little chance of resolving the final budget battle between the two longtime adversaries. Under the Constitution, the 107th Congress convenes on Jan. 3 and Clinton's term ends on Jan. 20.

Army and some others say the likeliest scenario is for an agreement to postpone final budget decisions until there is a new president, who Republicans hope will be a more sympathetic Bush. With Clinton losing leverage as

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## Iraq to resume oil exports, backs away from dispute with U.N.

BY WAIEL FALEH  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Iraq said Sunday it would resume its oil exports to fulfill its existing contracts, backing away from a halt it called two days earlier in a dispute with the United Nations over pricing.

Iraq, the third largest producer in OPEC, stopped production Friday, blaming the United Nations' refusal to authorize a new payment arrangement for exports under the oil-for-food program.

The halt, however, did not disrupt oil markets as many had feared. The United States has said it would tap its reserves to counter any Iraqi cut-off and Saudi Arabia — by far OPEC's largest producer — hinted it could do the same, citing the need to keep the market stable.

The announcement of Baghdad's turn-around was made Sunday by Oil Minister Amer Mohammed Rashid.

"The Iraqi oil policy has been always aimed at stability of the world oil market. Iraq has absolutely

no intention to terminate or hinder the exports of its crude in the world market," Rashid said at a news conference.

He said Iraq is working with U.N. oil overseers to export the full quantity of oil agreed to under the current six-month phase of the oil-for-food deal. This phase is due to end Tuesday, but because of the disruption, pumping will now be extended until sometime in January. Rashid said Iraq has no conditions for resuming exports.

Peter Gignoux, head of the petroleum desk at Saloman Smith Barney in London, said Iraq's decision "doesn't surprise me at all."

Gignoux noted that with oil prices still hovering above \$30 a barrel even after falling more than a dollar Friday, Iraq would be missing out on a handsome revenue stream if it continued to halt its crude exports.

"At the end of the day, they can't bear not to take advantage of these higher prices," said Gignoux.

Friday's suspension was "an excuse to push

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themselves further out of the (embargo) box," he added.

Iraq has been under U.N. sanctions since it invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and was forced out seven months later by a U.S.-led international coalition.

The current dispute came when Iraq made its monthly proposal last week for prices on its oil exports. The U.N. sanctions committee must approve the prices. Then under the oil-for-food deal, profits from Iraqi exports go into an escrow bank account used to buy food, medicine, humanitarian goods and to pay reparations for the invasion.

U.N. experts, however, said last week's pro-

posed prices were too low and the committee rejected them. The low price formula was believed to be Baghdad's attempt to compensate buyers of its crude for a surcharge of 50 cents a barrel that Iraq wants them to pay into an Iraqi-controlled bank account. Companies have indicated an unwillingness to pay the surcharge since it would violate U.N. sanctions.

In Kuwait — also a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries — Foreign Minister Shiekh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Sabah said Sunday that oil producers need to consult about how

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## Sanctions, Chavez could determine future of Venezuela's unions

BY ALEXANDER OLSON  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CARACAS, VENEZUELA — In an exercise condemned as non-democratic by international labor groups, Venezuelans voted in a government-sponsored referendum Sunday that sought to oust hundreds of opposition labor union leaders.

Threats of sanctions from abroad and voter apathy at home didn't dissuade leftist President Hugo Chavez from holding the referendum, which critics called a brazen attempt to bring organized labor under government control. Chavez's popularity among Venezuela's poor majority meant he was likely to win.

Venezuelans also voted for town councils and neighborhood committees Sunday, although local

newspapers and pollsters predicted an abstention rate of up to 80 percent among the country's 12 million registered voters.

Unions urged their members to boycott the vote, while many citizens said they were tired of voting in no fewer than seven elections and referendums since Chavez was elected president in 1998.

"How long are we going to have elections? We're tired, and it's time Chavez gets to work and stops accumulating so much power for nothing," said Marjorie Aguado, a 31-year-old businesswoman. "I'm staying home."

It's also holiday season, and most Venezuelans preferred gift shopping, piling Christmas trees atop cars and shooting fireworks at noisy parties to lining up for yet another ballot. Voting stations, usually packed at dawn for an election, were nearly

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deserted in many parts of Caracas early Sunday.

"What the people want is to forget politics and dedicate their time to more agreeable things, like preparing for the Christmas holidays," said Felipe Varone, a businessman who, like his 11 employees, avoided the polls.

Designed by a pro-Chavez Congress, Sunday's referendum asked Venezuelans if they want to suspend the heads of trade union confederations for

180 days. Venezuela's 2 million union workers then would elect new leaders.

The Geneva-based International Labor Organization and other groups said the poll violated international labor protocols by allowing non-union members to decide unions' affairs. They warned member nations could impose trade sanctions if the suspension occurs. The 1.7 million-member Venezue-

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## NEWS BRIEFS

### Federal agency questions handling of blood supplies

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal agency is questioning the handling of blood supplies by the American Red Cross, saying the agency repeatedly failed inspections over 15 years and continues to have problems that could harm patients. Documents filed in U.S. District Court by the Food and Drug Administration said the Red Cross is not in compliance with the current laws and regulations. "The problems are serious because of the potential for harm," FDA official Dr. Jay S. Epstein said Friday. The Red Cross collects about 6.5 million units of blood annually, about half of the nation's medical blood supply. Dr. Bernadine Healy, the American Red Cross president and chief executive, said the blood supplied by the organization is "the safest in the world."

### Pinochet indicted, ordered to stand trial on homicide charges

SANTIAGO, CHILE (AP) — The image still haunts Chileans: machine gun-toting soldiers leaping from helicopters in pastoral towns, dragging people away and torturing them in the aftermath of Gen. Augusto Pinochet's military coup. The 1973 mission, dubbed the "Caravan of Death," allegedly killed 72 people and helped solidify Pinochet's 17-year grip on power, which ended in 1990. Now it's coming back to haunt him. Pinochet, the alleged mastermind of the bloody campaign, took a step closer to facing trial Friday when a Chilean judge indicted him for the killing and kidnapping of dozens of political opponents during the Caravan of Death. Judge Juan Guzman also ordered the 85-year-old former dictator placed under house arrest.

### David Cassidy going to work on other projects

LAS VEGAS (AP) — David Cassidy will try his luck on some different projects. His "At the Copa" show in Las Vegas will close Jan. 21, less than a year after its debut. The 50-year-old former teen idol and "Partridge Family" star says he wants to spend more time with his family and pursue offers for a recording contract and a movie. He'll finish the second year of his contract with Harrah's Entertainment by performing concerts at other Harrah's properties.

### Turkish prisoners protest transfer from luxury prisons

SINCAN, TURKEY (AP) — Cells in Turkey's new maximum-security prisons are bright and airy, featuring private bathrooms, small kitchens, dining tables, upstairs bedrooms and even doors that open out onto courtyards. To Justice Minister Hikmet Sami Turk, the two-story, three-man cells stand comparison to "comfortable hotel rooms." To inmates, the cells are "coffins." Hundreds of prisoners are now 50 days into a hunger strike to protest their planned transfer from the open wards that Turkey's inmates say offer their only protection — safety in numbers — against torture.

"We don't oppose the luxury, but we oppose the fact that they will leave the prisoners ... to the mercy of wardens," said Kamil Karatas, an advocate with an Ankara-based support group for prisoners' families.

### Tiger hits out of bounds, still close to the lead

THOUSAND OAKS, CALIF. (AP) — Tiger Woods was trying to remember when he last hit out of bounds. It's been a while. Despite his errant shot and ensuing bogey on the second hole, Woods shot an 8-under 64 on Friday to remain just off the pace in the Williams World Challenge. Leader Sergio Garcia and Davis Love III also had course-record 64s at Sherwood Country Club, leaving Garcia two shots ahead of Love and three in front of tournament host Woods.