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Toddler's death suspicious

Rochester girl, 1, dies
in Kittery; neighbors
suspect abuse

By JENNIFER L. SAUNDERS
Democrat Staff Writer

KITTERY, Maine — State and local police are searching for clues in the death of a New Hampshire toddler while neighbors are mourning the loss and fearing she was a victim of child

abuse.

"The state police are investigating a death we have labeled as suspicious," Maine State Police Spokesman Steve McCausland said Thursday night.

Shortly after 12:30 p.m., he said, 21-month-old Cassidy Bortner was transported from her baby-sitter's residence

on Rogers Road in Kittery by ambulance to York Hospital, where she was pronounced dead.

"The baby sitter called police and rescue and reported the baby was unresponsive," McCausland said. "State police have been working with Kittery, Rochester and New Hampshire State

Police. We've conducted a number of interviews tonight and more are on the agenda tomorrow."

McCausland said Cassidy resided with her mother, 18-year-old Amanda

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Still no decision in presidential race

Dems look to courts for help

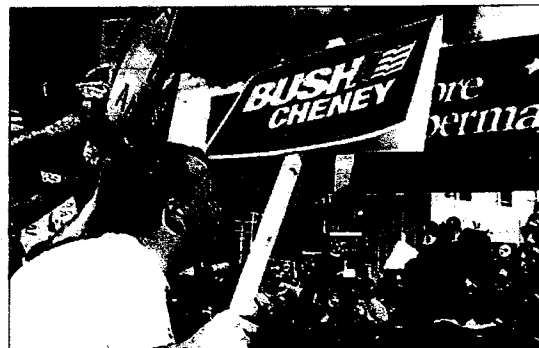
By RON FOURNIER
AP Political Writer

George W. Bush's lead over Al Gore in all-or-nothing Florida slipped beneath 300 votes in a suspense-filled recount Thursday, as Democrats threw the presidential election to the courts claiming "an injustice unparalleled in our history." The Bush campaign was considering recounts in two other close-voting states.

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Amid a campaign-style flurry of charges and countercharges, Gore campaign chairman William Daley said his party will support legal actions by voters and supporters who say a confusing ballot may have led them to vote accidentally



Voter complaints mounting

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Weird enough that the voting machine was broken, says Bridget Dickerson. But the polling place worker was downright infuriating.

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experience within a structured social program.

Results standards for modern and classical languages in the elemen-

enrolled in the program. Any student who is a behavior problem can be

dent's office and will be used for future WOW classes.

No decision

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acting as Gore's *récount* consigliere.

The Bush campaign fired back by staking its own claim to a Florida victory and questioning Gore's motives. Still, Republicans eyed recounts elsewhere in case Gore prevails in Florida, raising the specter of a lengthy, multistate battle.

"One of the options that they seem to be looking at is new elections. Our democratic process calls for a vote on Election Day, it does not call for us to continue voting until someone likes the outcome," Bush campaign chairman Don Evans said in Austin, Texas.

Both sides dispatched dozens of lawyers and political operatives to Florida and geared up fund-raising drives to finance what is exploding into a post-campaign recount campaign.

As the drama unfolded in Florida, Attorney General Janet Reno said in Washington she saw no reason for federal authorities to "jump in" the controversy. The former Miami prosecutor said she would review any complaints brought to her. "We are not here to generate controversy," she said.

There was already plenty of that.

An unofficial tally by The Associated Press showed that Gore had cut Bush's lead to 229 votes with 65 of 67 counties recounted. One by one, the counties reported throughout the day, as the candidates and their staff agonized over each return.

The official total lagged behind, and Secretary of State Katherine Harris said it could be as late as Tuesday — a week after the election — before the state certifies ballot results from all 67 counties. Nearly 6 million votes were cast Tuesday in Florida.

She said it may take until Nov. 17 to tabulate ballots cast by Floridians living overseas. "Nobody ever said that democracy was simple or efficient," said election board member Bob Crawford.

The winner of Florida stood to gain the state's 25 electoral votes — and the keys to the Oval Office, unless Bush's team makes good on a threat to contest Gore victories in Iowa and Wisconsin, among others.

With votes still dribbling in from across the country, Gore's lead in the popular vote was shrinking to about 200,000 votes out of 100 million. With a few precincts still unreported (as of

8 p.m. EST):

— Gore had 49,113,600 votes.

— Bush had 48,906,647 votes.

It is the tightest election since 1960, when John F. Kennedy defeated Richard Nixon by 118,574 votes. Though it has no bearing on who is the next president, the total-vote lead gives Gore added psychological standing in his fight to overturn Florida's results.

Republicans and Democrats alike said the Florida-vote challenge poses incredible risk for both candidates, because an evenly divided electorate will soon tire of the political suspense and begin looking for somebody to blame.

"This is serious stuff, it's time to cool partisan passions or risk being damaged goods, even if you win the presidency," said Democratic consultant Jim Duffy.

In competing news conferences Thursday, the strategies gelled: Bush's camp portrayed Gore as a poor loser who wants to overturn election-night returns that gave Bush the edge in Florida; Gore's camp accused Republicans of selfishly ignoring ballot irregularities and attempting to scare Americans with

talk of a constitutional crisis.

Christopher and Baker met Thursday in what was described by Democrats as an uneventful session.

Christopher dismissed Baker's election-on-hold remark as "self-serving myth" and pointedly said: "Let me assure you that the presidency goes on until January 20 in a vigorous way, and none of our allies are in any doubt as to who's in charge of the government until January 20."

But the election standoff rattled Wall Street, where stocks plunged after Daley's news conference but later recovered.

Eight lawsuits have been filed in state and federal courts to challenge the Florida results, including six in Palm Beach County and two in Tallahassee. One of the federal cases was withdrawn by the voter who filed. Democratic Party-backed lawsuits won't be filed until next week, party officials said.

The Tallahassee cases alleged race discrimination, and Palm Beach County voters sought a new election because they said the ballot was too confusing. Thousands of ballots were not counted because they

were punched twice. Democrats say Gore backers voted for Buchanan — then voted for Gore after realizing their mistake.

Bush aides said Palm Beach County is home to 17,000 voters allied with the Reform Party, and thousands of Palm Beach County ballots were invalidated in 1996.

In Florida, Daley said Democrats would seek a more thorough, second recount of ballots cast in Palm Beach, Dade, Broward and Volusia counties — some 1.78 million votes, many of them Democratic.

He said the Bush campaign was willing to "blithely dismiss the disenfranchisement of thousands of Floridians as being the usual mistakes" that afflict elections.

"I would assume that the courts will take a serious look at what may be an injustice unparalleled in our history," Daley told CBS.

Both candidates were working simultaneously to prepare their transitions to power and fight the ballot dispute. Democrats were trying to raise \$3 million to finance Gore's challenge, while Republicans geared up their own fund-raising drive.

The Bush campaign conducted

conference calls with allies across the country to rally the troops, but instead heard a slew of complaints. GOP governors, in particular, warned that Bush's camp was losing the public relations battle to Gore and needed to send more political and media operatives to Florida, said sources involved in one of the calls. The Bush campaign said aides were being sent and promised to be more aggressive.

Nearly 48 hours after the polls closed, Bush had won 29 states for 246 electoral votes. Gore had won 18 states plus the District of Columbia for 255. New Mexico and Oregon were too close to call.

Hedging their bets, Bush officials were scrutinizing close-vote states other than Florida and pondering whether to press for recounts. High on the list were Iowa and Wisconsin, with a combined 18 electoral votes. A recount was under way in New Mexico's most populous county, too. And Oregon law requires a recount in close races.

Bush and Gore laid low, leaving their advisers to compete in news conferences from Florida and Austin, Texas.

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Bortner, in Rochester, N.H. He said he did not yet have a street address for Bortner's residence there.

No arrests had been made as of late Thursday, McCausland said. The Chief Medical Examiner's Office in Augusta will be conducting an autopsy today, and police are awaiting the results of that examination.

"She was about one-and-a-half years old," said William Pierce, a neighbor of Jeffrey Marshall, the man who took care of her at least once each week in Kittery. "She liked Cocoa Puffs. That's what she had for breakfast this morning."

Pierce took a deep breath, picturing the child he knew only by the name of Cassidy. He remembered how happy she had been with a stuffed toy Marshall purchased for her at Wal-Mart. Just the day before,

Pierce recalled, he had held her in his arms.

"She would say, 'Give us loves,' and give you little kisses here," he said, touching his cheek.

The little girl, whose mother reportedly came from Sanford but currently resided with her boyfriend in Rochester, N.H., had been dropped off at the home of Marshall, a family friend, shortly after 8 a.m. on Thursday, according to a neighbor. The neighbor said the mother's boyfriend is not Cassidy's biological father.

Marshall had been looking after the little girl at least once a week for several months in his Rogers Road apartment while the mother spent time with her boyfriend or went to work at one of the Kittery outlets, a neighbor said. On Thursday morn-

ing, the neighbor said, either Bortner or her boyfriend told Marshall that 21-month-old Cassidy had been struck in the head with a baseball while playing with it in the Rochester residence the night before.

As the morning went on, one neighbor said that Marshall mentioned the little girl seemed to be tired or lethargic. In the early afternoon, he called police requesting rescue personnel when the child lost consciousness.

"He just didn't know how serious this was," Pierce said of the child's head injury. When Marshall received word of the child's death, Pierce said he was devastated, crying and saying, "She was just a little baby girl."

"She was so precious," said Tom McNeil, who resides in a separate apartment in the same duplex as

Marshall. He said he, Marshall, Pierce and others who knew the toddler could not help but love her sweet nature. "Your natural instinct is just to love and protect. That anyone could do something else is just inconceivably horrible," he said.

McNeil said he could not stop thinking of Cassidy's large, blue eyes. He also remembered she wore her long, dark blonde hair in a high pony-tail.

"She was a beautiful little girl," he said, visibly moved by the memory of her. "She loved to be hugged."

Pierce was at his nearby residence when paramedics and police arrived at the duplex, and he went to the house to find Cassidy receiving cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

"She looked so helpless," he said softly. She was transported from the

house by ambulance, he said, and sometime later he asked police how she was doing. "They told us she didn't make it," he said.

For neighbors in the area who saw the little girl fairly regularly, the feeling now is that her tragic death was anything but an accident. They believe Cassidy was fatally injured before she was brought to Marshall's residence. As one neighbor put it, the signs of child abuse were always there, but they did not recognize them.

"It was right in front of us," he told another neighbor. "It was right there."

On occasions prior to Thursday, the neighbor said, the little girl was brought to the Rogers Road residence with bruises on her face. Each time, however, neighbors said the

child's mother and her boyfriend had a plausible excuse for the marks. With the propensity most toddlers have for falling down and the lack of bruises anywhere but her face, at least one of the Rogers Road residents said he believed the excuses until Thursday.

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Chaos reigned. It may take weeks to untangle the thickening legal and political webs and determine the nation's 43rd president.

"The presidential election is ... on hold," said James A. Baker III, the secretary of state in the Bush administration brought in

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Amid a campaign-style flurry of charges and countercharges, Gore campaign chairman William Daley said his party will support legal actions by voters and supporters who say a confusing ballot may have led them to vote accidentally for Reform Party candidate Pat Buchanan.

"We're raising some very serious questions and legal actions will be taken," Daley said at a Florida session with Warren Christopher, the former secretary of state



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With every single ballot being scrutinized in Florida, thou- sands of Americans elsewhere are complaining that they des- perately wanted to vote on Tuesday but couldn't.

"Most of time it doesn't matter," said Terry Madonna, a pro- fessor of political science at Millersville University in Pennsylvania. "This time it does."

Dickerson, a New Yorker who works in a chironactor's



New York Times News Service photo

ER, left, a supporter of Republican presiden- Texas Gov. George W. Bush debates with an

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