

# Congressional Democrats ratify Bush election coup in US

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At a joint session of the US Congress January 6 to count the Electoral College vote in the 2000 election, Democratic leaders of the House and Senate officially submitted to the hijacking of the presidency by the Republican Party and the US Supreme Court and the installation of George W. Bush in the White House.

Although 20 Democratic congressmen, mainly members of the Congressional Black Caucus, formally objected to the awarding of Florida's 25 electoral votes to Bush, not one of the 50 Democratic senators would join in the objection, as required by an 1887 law governing the counting of the electoral vote.

If even a single Democratic senator had signed an objection, the joint session would have adjourned and the House and Senate would have convened separately to vote, with a majority of both Houses required to sustain the objection. The Democrats control the Senate temporarily, since it is divided 50-50 with Vice President Al Gore holding the tie-breaking vote until January 20, but the Republicans hold a narrow majority in the House.

Such a procedure would have been politically damaging to the incoming Bush administration, underscoring the fragility and illegitimacy of the Republican victory. But Senate Democrats refused to back any objection, insisting that the presidential election contest had been ended by the US Supreme Court decision of December 12 halting hand recounts in Florida, and Gore's concession the next day.

Among those Democrats who refused to sign an objection to according Florida's electoral votes to Bush were such prominent liberals as Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, Paul Wellstone of Minnesota, Tom Harkin of Iowa and Barbara Boxer of California, along with both Florida senators, Robert Graham and Bill Nelson, and the newly sworn-in senator from New

York, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Most declined to discuss their action and many did not attend the joint session. But one leading Democrat, Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut, dismissed the protest by the black caucus as an empty gesture, saying, "It was a very good point they made," and then adding, "It's over with."

Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy, the top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said that he and other senators did not want to disrupt the proceedings. "There is a great deal of frustration that the Supreme Court decided the election by stopping the count in Florida," he said. "As much as I disagree with the court's decision, I uphold it as the law of the land and won't object. We will, all of us, Democrats and Republicans, accept George W. Bush as the next president."

Such comments demonstrate the indifference of the Democratic Party to the fundamental issues raised in the Florida election contest. The Senate Democrats, like President Clinton and Vice President Gore, speak for a section of the upper crust of American society that has grown increasingly contemptuous of the democratic rights of working people.

There was another reason for the Senate Democrats' unanimous opposition to any further election protest. Non-support to any House objections was agreed as part of a back room deal between Democratic Senate leader Tom Daschle and Republican Senate leader Trent Lott, in which the Democrats will share equally in committee seats and congressional staff positions in the newly organized Senate. The Republicans will hold all the committee and subcommittee chairmanships and Lott will still be majority leader, thanks to the tie-breaking vote held by incoming Vice President Richard Cheney.

House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt and other House Democratic leaders tacitly sanctioned this arrangement, staying away from the joint session and trying unsuccessfully to discourage any public opposition from the black caucus to the certification of Bush's Electoral College victory.

In their remarks on the floor of the House, several of the black congressmen referred bitterly to the Democratic leadership's opposition to any protest against the installation of Bush and the theft of the presidential election, although such statements were cut short by Vice President Gore, serving for the final time as presiding officer of the Senate, who ruled that no speeches could be delivered by those making objections.

"I don't care that it is not signed by a senator," said Rep. Maxine Waters of California as she handed in her written objection. "The chair would advise that the rules do care," Gore replied, triggering applause by Republicans.

Representative Jesse Jackson Jr., a Chicago Democrat and son of the civil rights leader, said, "It is a sad day in America when we can't find a senator to sign the objection." At one point, Jackson asked if any senator in the chamber would step forward and sign his protest, but none would.

Rep. Corrine Brown, a Florida Democrat, said, "We keep hearing, 'Get over this.' We will never get over this. The Supreme Court selected George W. Bush as president—he was not elected."

Only one white Democrat, Peter Deutsch, whose district includes much of Palm Beach County, Florida, joined in objecting to the awarding of Florida's electoral votes to Bush.

After the objections failed, nearly all the congressmen involved in the protest walked out of the chamber en masse rather than await the official announcement of the election results, which showed Bush with 271 electoral votes and Gore with 266. A single Gore elector from Washington DC cast a blank ballot, protesting the lack of voting representation in Congress for the citizens of the US capital.

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus undoubtedly feel pressure from their constituents—Bush won only 6 percent of the black vote, worse than any Republican candidate since Barry Goldwater, who had the open support of Southern segregationists in 1964.

Their protest was one of the few occasions when popular sentiment has found open expression in Congress.

There is another factor involved, however, which accounts for the bitterness of their opposition to the Republican takeover of the presidency. The material interests of the social layer with which the black congressmen are most intimately associated—privileged layers of the black middle class and black entrepreneurs—are threatened by the entry of Bush into the White House.

The Bush administration is expected to scrap affirmative action and set aside programs that guarantee a certain percentage of government contracts to minority businesses. The nomination of two vocal opponents of affirmative action—John Ashcroft for attorney general and Linda Chavez for secretary of labor—is a clear signal of this policy.



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