

“Count Them All Again”
***Washington Post* Editorial**
November 18, 2000
By Tom Evans

“Nothing should have a higher priority than the integrity of our political process. Not Vice President Al Gore, or Governor George W. Bush, or the Republican Party or the Democratic Party. Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris will have irretrievably darkened the cloud that already hangs over the presidential election if her decision on Wednesday to ignore hand-counted revised tallies is permitted to stand.

Harris has declared her intention to certify the statewide results after overseas absentee ballots have been counted, the expectation being that those votes will add to Bush’s current 300 vote lead. Yesterday, a Florida Circuit Judge refused to order her to accept results of manual vote recounts that could give the lead to Al Gore.

Throughout the campaign, Bush promised that he was the kind of guy who was a uniter and not a divider. He promised to bring people together, not push them farther apart. His representatives now need to cool their rhetoric; and if they cannot, they need to be placed in a political deep freeze.

Similarly, Al Gore should rigidly enforce his good and well-expressed intentions. Bush does not want hand recounts limited only to Broward and Palm Beach counties, ostensibly because they could be subject to fraud. It is also true that the results would almost certainly tilt in Al Gore’s favor. I believe that is precisely why Secretary Harris took the position she did.

But hand counts do not necessarily have to be inaccurate or prone to fraud. It all depends on the manner in which they are conducted. There have already been recounts in several Florida counties, six of which had majorities for George W. Bush. In addition, we should bear in mind that for at least the first 150 years of our nation’s history, hand counts were the only way to count votes and they were accepted as fair and legitimate.

Getting it right is clearly more important than meeting an arbitrary deadline with flawed and questionable results. George W. Bush has understandably rejected a hand recount limited only to Broward and Palm Beach counties because of their overwhelmingly Democratic registration.

Therefore, it seems to me that the only fair course would be to conduct a time-limited hand recount in all 67 of Florida's counties, using clear and consistent criteria for these recounts. Surely, both Governor Bush and Vice President Gore should agree to such a resolution.

Yes, there needs to be finality for this unbelievable situation (and Gore has finally committed to a recount ending in one week). But of utterly more importance is to get it right. The votes need to be counted accurately, fairly and honestly in Florida. Unless that happens, the next presidency will be a flawed one indeed, and our country and this world could suffer irreparable harm.

America needs to come together, and with razor-thin margins in both the House and Senate, we do, in fact, need someone who can unite and not divide. That person could be a President Bush or a President Gore. However, it will be neither one unless the American people accept the results in Florida as honestly representing the will of the voters in the Sunshine State.”