

GORE BREAKS RANKS AND BACKS BID TO GIVE ELIAN, KIN RESIDENCY STATUS

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Body

Vice President **Gore broke** with the Clinton administration yesterday to **back** legislation to grant **Elian** Gonzalez and his family the **status** of permanent U.S. residents.

Gore, the Democratic presidential candidate, urged Congress to pass a law that would grant the **status** not only to the boy but to his father, stepmother, half-brother, grandmothers and grandfather - all now in Cuba - "so that the case can be adjudicated properly."

The administration has **backed** the Immigration and Naturalization Service in its drive to return the boy to his father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez. In addition, President Clinton has pleaded that the dispute be kept out of politics.

Gore's comments came during a day of continued jockeying by U.S. officials and **Elian's** Miami relatives over the boy's fate.

In other developments:

Hoping to avoid an ugly confrontation, the INS continued to seek written assurances from the Miami relatives that they would respect a pending appeals court ruling on whether the boy should be sent to Cuba. Yesterday, INS officials agreed to delay a move to strip **Elian** of his legal **status** here - thereby making him subject to immediate deportation - until Tuesday. Talks will continue Monday.

Attorney General Janet Reno appealed for calm in her native Miami. "The people I know in the Cuban community came to this country and have contributed so much to it because they believe in the rule of law," she said. "I don't think they came to this country to incite violence."

Attorney Gregory Craig announced that he was applying for visas on behalf of **Elian's** father and other family members to come to the United States and stay "whatever time it takes" to exhaust legal appeals mounted by Miami relatives who seek to keep the boy. But, Craig said, the father insists upon temporary custody of **Elian** while the legal wrangling continues.

There were signs yesterday that the U.S. government would turn the boy over to his father if he comes to the United States from Cuba.

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State Department officials indicated they would quickly approve a visa application for Juan Miguel Gonzalez, though the matter was complicated when Gonzalez demanded temporary custody of his 6-year-old son.

A government official involved in the case, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the INS "would be hard-pressed not to honor" Gonzalez's request if he comes here.

A VIGIL GOES ON

Cubans in Miami continued their vigil outside the home where Eliau has stayed since he was rescued at sea on Thanksgiving Day, after he saw his mother perish along with several others who were fleeing Cuba in a small boat.

The community has seized on the boy as a symbol of their fight against Cuban repression. Cuban President Fidel Castro has used their "kidnapping" of Eliau to make Cuban Americans appear anti-family and contemptuous of their own federal government.

In Washington, attorney Craig asked: "Can anyone doubt that the time is long overdue for this boy to be reunited with his father?"

Craig, who was a special counsel for President Clinton during his impeachment trial, told reporters he was about to apply for visas for Eliau's Cuban relatives, but learned that visas must be applied for at the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba by the relatives themselves.

The services of Craig, a member of the firm of Williams & Connolly, will be paid through contributions to a humanitarian fund established by the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, the Washington-based organization said in a statement.

State Department spokesman James Foley indicated the administration would quickly approve visas for Gonzalez and his immediate family. The INS, however, had no immediate response to Gonzalez's demand for temporary custody of the boy once he arrives.

A 31-PERSON CONTINGENT

Foley declined to say whether the administration would approve visas for a much larger group of Eliau's classmates, teachers, medical experts and legal advisers - 31 people in all - whom Castro hopes to send to Washington to ease the boy's "reinsertion" into Cuban society. Castro unveiled that plan, likening it to "the mountain coming to Muhammad," in a televised speech Wednesday night.

Under the proposal, the Cuban visitors would live and study with Eliau in diplomatic residences of Cuban officials in Washington.

One U.S. official dismissed Castro's plan, which would include sightseeing tours of Washington for 12 of Eliau's peers from kindergarten and first grade as they all await the ruling of a federal appeals court, expected in early May.

"These are 5- and 6-year-olds," said the official, who asked not to be identified. "These are not checkers on a board."

In a statement last night, Castro said the inclusion of everyone on the list was nonnegotiable.

U.S. officials were examining visa regulations to determine how many of the would-be companions would be eligible to join Eliau's father. Strict eligibility limits exist for Cuban visas.

Both major-party candidates for president sought to crush the INS threat. Gore, who has contended from the outset that domestic-relations courts, not the INS, should determine custody, said yesterday that he would support legislation by Sen. Bob Graham (D., Fla.) and others.

"Eliau should never have been forced to choose between freedom and his own father," Gore said. "Now we must take action, here on our own shores, to make sure that Eliau's best interests are served."

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White House aides reacted with a measure of disdain, but hardly surprise, at what was interpreted as a strictly self-protective gesture by **Gore**, the Washington Post reported. **Gore** aides denied that the statement was motivated by politics and said that he has long been concerned that the immigration law under which **Eliau**'s fate has been argued is governed by concerns over diplomatic precedent rather than what is best for the boy.

Florida has 25 electoral votes, the fourth-largest prize available on Election Day. The state was initially thought to be favorable to Bush, since his brother Jeb is governor, but **Gore** has stepped up his campaigning there if for no other reason than to force Bush to devote time and resources to the state.

House Democratic leader Richard A. Gephardt had no immediate reaction to **Gore**'s announcement. Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle continues to believe that "the boy should be returned to his father in Cuba," said an aide.

A MAYOR'S VIEW

The vice president's Republican rival, Gov. Bush, called **Gore**'s announcement an "eleventh-hour position."

"I'm glad the vice president now supports legal **residency** for **Eliau** Gonzalez," said Bush, campaigning yesterday in Milwaukee. "I wish he could convince the rest of the administration of the wisdom of that approach."

In Miami, Mayor Joe Carollo appeared to **back** away from warnings that violence could erupt in the city's streets.

"We will not have any violence, any violent reactions, in Miami" if **Eliau** is returned to Cuba, Carollo said in a CNN interview.

Carollo nevertheless reiterated his assertion that local police could not be expected to carry out federal immigration policy.

"If the federal government decides **Eliau** must be returned, they have to be the ones to go into the house and return him," Carollo said. "Miami police will not be the ones to go into the house and return him to Castro's dictatorship."

* This article contains information from Inquirer wire services.

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