

News Notes

Kerry battles back into race with Bush

Democratic Presidential Nominee John Kerry erased President George W. Bush's lead in the polls immediately after the two debated on September 30. A recent CNN poll had both candidates tied at 49%, while an Associate Press poll shows a 50-46 lead for Kerry. It appears Kerry has stemmed Bush's momentum from September, and is on a bit of a surge himself. The polls have been shifting over the past month, and this trend makes predicting a winner difficult. The last debate between Bush and Kerry takes place on Wednesday, October 13 at 10:00PM AST.

Martha Stewart starts Prison Term

Last Friday, Martha Stewart began serving her five month sentence in a minimum security prison in West Virginia. Despite being disgraced by having been found guilty of conspiracy and obstruction of justice related to insider trading, a defiant Stewart said, "There are many, many good people who have gone to prison. Look at Nelson Mandela." Someone's not full of herself! Mandela was trying to achieve freedom for 90% of his country, Stewart ripped off her shareholders. Yeah, they're definitely on a level playing field.

Staunch Bush Ally Re-elected in Australia

The Liberal-National coalition government of Australian Prime Minister John Howard has been re-elected in Australia. Domestic issues dominated the election, but Iraq was also an issue, as Australia has had troops in Iraq since the conflict began. Howard pledged to keep the current compliment of 900 Australian troops in Iraq while the Labor opposition announced it would pull the troops out of Iraq by Christmas.

The Not-So Dire Situation in Ottawa Don't Expect the Government to Fall Anytime Soon

Last week, the media speculated on a crisis on Parliament Hill that threatened to bring down the government of Paul Martin and possibly send Canadians back to the polls only months after the last election. Expect to hear plenty of media speculation concerning the Martin government being defeated over the next year or so, but don't expect the Liberal minority government to fall.

If the government is defeated, the Governor General can either call an election or ask the opposition to form the government, the most common response being to call an election. Keeping this consequences in mind, none of the four major parties would want to appear responsible in bringing down the government and likely forcing an election call immediately after an election had just occurred.

The so-called crisis was fuelled by political rhetoric from all four parties. On Thursday, the Bloc Quebecois introduced an amendment which included giving Quebec more control over finances at the expense of the federal government. The media jumped on the tough political talk and proclaimed the government might fall, making the situation appear much more desperate than it really was. After the evening the four parties reached a deal on the amendment, removing the statement promising Quebec control over federal funds.

Indeed all four parties say they want this minority government to work, but how exactly will this work? If all members are present, 154 votes are needed for a majority. If any three of the parties vote together,

they control the house, but if this is not the case things get interesting, as some lines were drawn in the sand last week. The NDP planned to vote with the Liberals against the amendment before it was revised, while the Conservatives were to vote with the Bloc. These two rival camps appear to have emerged. The NDP and the Liberals combined control 153 seats, as do the Bloc and the Tories. If these parties vote together, the deciding vote belongs to an Independent MP, Chuck Cadman, a former Conservative who failed to win the party nomination in the last election. While many expect him to vote with the Conservatives, he did not reveal which side he would have voted with last week. If all four parties fail to co-operate and these two camps emerge on some issues, this single Independent would hold the balance of power in the House of Commons.

However, this may not happen. On Friday, the Liberals introduced tough new legislation to combat child pornography which is sure to please the Conservatives who have been pushing for this. Expect the parties to work together, despite continuing to throw political barbs back and forth, and the media to use these comments to exaggerate the situation. At the same time, remember, the average minority government has lasted 18 months. It would be a safe bet to expect more of the same in this government, because for at least a year, no party will be willing to force an election and face angry voters.