

Beacon Hill Byline – By Rep. Mary Rogeness

December 3, 2000

## **The Presidency**

It seems like it was months ago, but it was only November 8th. I was speaking at a Monson Veterans Day luncheon. Like everyone else, I had expected to know who the president-elect would be on that date.

Veterans were the honored guests, especially Richard Knight, the Korea veteran who received a Bronze Star for his service. Several of the men wore their World War II era uniforms. When my turn to speak arrived, I talked about the delay in learning the electoral outcome.

Thanking the veterans for their service to the nation in time of war, I commented that they had guaranteed our freedom and upheld the constitution and laws that would be used to decide this election. Governor Bush was the apparent victor in the constitutionally established Electoral College, even though he trailed in the popular vote. A full recount of the votes in Florida was required by the laws of that state before that victory would be certain.

A president had not been elected in our lifetimes without winning the popular vote, but according to the provisions of the US Constitution, it was the likely outcome. Everyone seemed to accept that resolution, and I doubt if anyone in the room could have imagined that the presidency would remain unresolved a full four weeks later.

At the end of last week, more than 40 lawsuits had been filed. State courts, the Florida Supreme Court, federal court and the US Supreme Court had all been asked to intervene in the Florida presidential election. We once thought that November 17 would bring finality, but the Florida Supreme Court moved that deadline back to November 26. Now even the Electoral College date of December 18 does not assure an end.

Pollsters now state that the public seems unconcerned about the delay. It is my belief that the government should be concerned about the delay. My governmental experience, limited to an office that represents 40,000 individuals, shows me that officials need time to assume responsibilities. In presidential terms, it is called transition, and the task is so massive that \$5 million is appropriated by Congress to fund that ten-week process. And that time is nearly half over and nobody is authorized to undertake the transition. Assuming the presidency is more than taking the oath of office on Inauguration Day.

These thoughts were in my mind last weekend when I was again speaking to a group of constituents. On Sunday I greeted the parishioners at East Longmeadow's First Baptist Church at the annual Friends Sunday. Instead of talking about constitutions and laws, it seemed more appropriate to ask them to pray for a resolution in this election.

Note: Maybe our prayers have been answered. After this column was written, the US Supreme Court vacated the decision of the Florida Supreme Court to delay voter certification and sent the case back to Florida. And Florida Judge Sauls rejected the contest lawsuit filed by Vice President Gore.