

# *Bush Criticizes Administration For Removing Boy 'at Gunpoint'*

By DON VAN NATTA Jr.

WASHINGTON, April 22 — In harsh language laced with outrage, Gov. George W. Bush of Texas criticized the Clinton administration for its decision to use force when it transferred custody of 6-year-old Elián Gonzalez to his father early today.

Mr. Bush said the photograph of the frightened boy being "removed from his home at gunpoint" was "chilling" and "not an image a freedom-loving nation wants to show the world."

Within hours of the 5 a.m. raid today, Mr. Bush, the presumptive Republican nominee for president, seized on the government's decision to use force to remove Elián from the house in the Little Havana section of Miami.

"I am profoundly saddened and troubled that the administration was not able to negotiate a resolution, and instead decided to use force to take a little boy from the place he calls home in the middle of the night," Mr. Bush said.

In a brief statement that avoided any mention of today's raid, Vice President Al Gore continued to distance himself from the administration's handling of the five-month-old custody case.

"As I have said, I believe this issue should have been handled through a family court and with the family coming together," Mr. Gore said.

But other senior Republicans also condemned the action. So did Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York, who is running for the Senate.

Republican Congressional leaders condemned the government's action as heavy-handed, with the Senate majority leader, Trent Lott, Republican of Mississippi, saying, "my first thought was that this could only happen in Castro's Cuba."

Some law enforcement officials said they also felt the raid was heavy-handed. But others said the raid was successful, particularly since no one was seriously injured and the federal agents were able to move in and out quickly in what could have been a volatile situation.

"I think it was entirely appropriate," said John P. Julian, a private investigator and a former Miami police officer who has participated in raids. "When you enter a home under these kinds of circumstances, you have to expect, and be prepared for, the absolute worst. You don't know what is inside that house. You don't know what the reaction will be."