

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (Los Angeles Times) — Ousted Honduran president Manuel Zelaya on Tuesday continued to build support for his return home, but the country's de facto rulers said he'd be arrested the minute he set foot on national territory.

As Zelaya addressed a supportive United Nations audience in New York, Hondurans in Tegucigalpa were demonstrating against and, in smaller numbers, in favor of the deposed leftist leader. Zelaya was flown to exile in Costa Rica early Sunday after soldiers removed him from his home.

Honduran Atty. Gen. Luis Alberto Rubi, who clashed frequently with Zelaya, said Tuesday that arrest warrants had been issued accusing Zelaya of 18 crimes, including treason and abuse of authority. Rubi said Honduran authorities would ask Interpol to detain Zelaya, who has said he plans to return to Honduras on Thursday with a delegation of regional heads of state and other officials.

"The justice tribunals of my country have issued orders to capture Zelaya because he broke laws," said Roberto Micheletti, the former head of Congress whom legislators chose to replace Zelaya.

The Obama administration has joined regional leaders in condemning the coup, and U.S. officials said Tuesday that they had severed contacts with the Honduran military. Washington, which has maintained close ties with the military for decades, will consider cutting off hundreds of millions of dollars in aid, officials said. That would require the administration to formally label Zelaya's ouster a military coup.

In Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital, several thousand opponents of Zelaya filled a downtown square waving blue-and-white Honduran flags and denouncing Zelaya's ties to Latin American leftists, including Venezuela's Hugo Chavez.

Repeatedly invoking God and fatherland, Micheletti thanked his followers "united here to protect democracy" and pledged to go ahead with the presidential election scheduled for the end of November.

He clasped the hand of Gen. Romeo Vasquez, the jowly, camouflage-clad army chief whom Zelaya had tried to fire, and raised their arms overhead in a sign of victory. Micheletti said army officers were heroes for seizing Zelaya from his bedroom Sunday morning and bundling him away, still in his pajamas.

Ousted Honduras president builds support for return



"I'm surprised that Barack Obama is not better informed," retired Col. Nataanael Guevara, 56, said, referring to U.S. condemnation of the coup. "If Honduras falls, Central America falls and then Mexico. I'm ready to put my uniform back on if it means defending my country from Hugo Chavez."

Guevara was in the crowd rallying in support of the new provisional government. Wendy Marisela Rodriguez, a young mother who runs a small shop, was also there.

Meanwhile, major labor unions, which support Zelaya, declared open-ended strikes. Pro-Zelaya demonstrators staged a small march, a day after groups clashed violently with army and police forces.

Zelaya had angered the army, the courts and Congress — including his own party — by

trying to change the constitution to allow the reelection of the president (a tactic employed by Chavez to remain in office). He was seven months shy of the conclusion of his own, tumultuous four-year term.

Critics accuse Zelaya, a 56-year-old rancher and logging tycoon who favors white cowboy hats, of frequently flouting the law.

Enrique Ortez, the foreign minister appointed by Micheletti, told CNN's Spanish-language network that Zelaya had also been allowing planes from Venezuela to fly cocaine through Honduran airspace to the U.S. He offered no proof. Honduras, like its neighbors, is an important transshipment point for drugs headed north.

Zelaya was unpopular at home, with approval ratings recently almost as bad as those

of president George W. Bush during his final months in office. But the coup has been condemned almost universally outside Honduras, including by unanimous vote Tuesday by the UN General Assembly.

Shortly before hearing Zelaya speak, the body approved a resolution calling for his reinstatement without conditions.

Other pressure on the impoverished, conservative country included a World Bank decision to freeze lending programs. Neighboring countries suspended trade.

Zelaya told the General Assembly that he would abandon the referendum he had been attempting to use to promote changes in the constitution, and that he would return to private life at the end of his term.

Although he has said before that he has no plans to seek a way to be reelected, making the pledge before an international audience might have been a bid to reassure his foreign supporters and ensure his reinstatement.

Zelaya said the presidents of Argentina and Ecuador, as well as the head of the Organization of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza, had agreed to accompany him on his return Thursday.

The logistics of returning to Honduras would be complicated, however, and the attempt could be disastrous for all sides. Analysts suggested that Zelaya may be setting today as a way to hasten international efforts to negotiate a settlement to the standoff.

"It's rather obvious that the demand that Zelaya return makes sense," said Kevin Casas-Zamora, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a former vice president of Costa Rica.

But, he said, "the return of Zelaya won't solve the underlying problem here, which is a huge governance problem. We're talking about a guy who is at odds with virtually every institution and political actor in the country. He won't be able to govern."



Foes of Sotomayor emboldened by discrimination case

WASHINGTON (AP) — Foes of Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor celebrated the high court's reversal of her decision in a reverse discrimination case.

The 5-4 ruling Monday, backing of reverse discrimination claims by white firefighters, is unlikely to derail Sotomayor's nomination — and it may not even sway a vote. Reaction to the decision fell almost purely along partisan lines, with Republicans cheering the decision and saying it raises serious concerns about the judge, and Democrats condemning the opinion and arguing that Sotomayor had acted appropriately.

Still, the Supreme Court's decision in the case of Ricci v. DeStefano highlighted the competing ideological strains that will shape the debate over confirming Sotomayor.

Conservatives who cheered the reversal as a blow in favor of evenhanded application of anti-discrimination laws said it deepened their questions about the judge's ability to keep her personal opinions and background out of her decisions.

"This case will only raise more questions in the minds of the American people concerning Judge Sotomayor's commitment to treat each individual fairly and not as a member of a group," said Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama, the senior Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Liberals who denounced the ruling as potentially damaging to workplace diversity efforts countered that the decision should in fact end questions about whether Sotomayor is an "activist judge."

Sotomayor and her panel "did what judges are supposed to do, they followed precedent," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., the Judiciary Committee's chairman. He called the overturned appeals court decision an example of "judicial restraint."

Sotomayor's supporters noted that the appeals court decision followed well-established legal precedents — something conservatives routinely say judges should do. They also pointed out that she did not actually write the appeals court decision but was rather one member of a three-judge panel that rejected the white firefighters' claim of discrimination.

At issue in the case was a decision by New Haven, Conn., to throw out a promotion exam for firefighters because virtually no minorities scored well enough to qualify. The Supreme Court ruled that the city's fear of a racial discrimination lawsuit by minority firefighters wasn't by itself enough to allow it to discriminate against the white candidates who did well enough to get promotions.

But Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, joined in her dissent by Justice David Souter — whom Sotomayor would replace if confirmed — said civil rights laws were never meant to prevent employers from trying to avoid discriminating against minorities. They said no firefighters were entitled to a promotion, nor were minority firefighters given preferential treatment.

Conservatives pounced on the decision to amplify their case against Sotomayor. They have criticized her harshly for saying she hoped a "wise Latina" would usually reach better conclusions than a white male without similar experiences.



Franken wins Senate battle

The Minnesota Supreme Court declared comedian-turned-politician Al Franken the winner of the state's U.S. Senate race, ending an eight-month-long election saga and giving Democrats a 60-seat majority that theoretically would allow them to block GOP filibusters.

In a unanimous ruling, the court rejected Republican Norm Coleman's legal arguments that some absentee ballots had been improperly counted and that some localities had used inconsistent standards in counting votes. The ruling led Coleman to concede his Senate seat to Franken, who could be sworn in as soon as next week, when the Senate returns from a recess.

"The Supreme Court has spoken. We have a United States senator," Coleman said in a news conference outside his home in St. Paul. "It's time to move forward." Gov. Tim Pawlenty (R) signed the election certificate declaring Franken the winner.

The Democrats now have their largest majority in the Senate since 1978, but their ability to prevent filibusters as they attempt to push President Obama's agenda is likely to prove illusory. A pair of prominent Democrats, Sens. Edward M. Kennedy (Mass.) and Robert C. Byrd (W.Va.), have missed a raft of votes this year because of illness and, although Byrd was released from a Washington area hospital yesterday, it is unclear how often either will be present in the chamber.

Efforts to maintain party unity are also hampered by the presence of a clutch of centrist Democrats, such as Sen. Mary Landrieu (La.), who have said they oppose the public option in health-care reform legislation that would seek to create a government program to compete with private insurers. A number of Senate Democrats representing states that rely heavily on manufacturing jobs have also expressed concern about the climate-change bill, another Obama priority, that passed the House last week.

"The idea that you've got 60 reliable Democrats for votes for sweeping policy change simply doesn't work; it's not the reality of it," said Norman J. Ornstein, a congressional expert at the American Enterprise Institute. "The larger challenge for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid or Barack Obama is managing expectations of people who are thinking: When you get 60 votes, you get to do whatever you want. And they most assuredly do not."

In a statement, the White House said Obama looks "forward to working with Senator-Elect Franken to build a new foundation for growth and prosperity by lowering health care costs and investing in the kind of clean energy jobs and industries that will help America lead in the 21st century."

(Source: The Washington Post)

Labour MP Harry Cohen quits after MPs' expenses scandal

A Labour MP who designated a converted schoolhouse in Colchester as his main residence while claiming second home expenses on a property nine miles from Parliament has announced his resignation.

Harry Cohen, Labour MP for Leyton and Wanstead, claimed thousands of pounds on his expenses for redecorating his second home.

Harry Cohen's one-bedroom schoolhouse in Colchester is registered as his main home, despite being 70 miles from his east London constituency.

Harry Cohen, who has been reported to the Parliamentary sleaze watchdog over his living arrangements, said that the expenses scandal had been a "major influence" in his decision to quit at the next election.

The MP had come under heavy criticism for his decision to claim more than £100,000 in second home expenses on a house in his constituency of Leyton and Wanstead, east London, within easy commuting distance of the Commons.

He was able to designate the Leyton property as his second home after registering a house 70 miles away in Colchester, Essex, as his main residence.

Announcing his decision to stand down, Mr. Cohen, 59, who denies any wrong-doing, said that the strain of the criticism over his expenses, and the formal investigation into his claims, were the main factors behind his departure.

He added that he had not wanted to exacerbate the "intolerable" stress on his 69-year-old wife Ellen, who suffers from ill-health.

Explaining his decision to step down at the next general election after more than 26 years as an MP, he said: "These constant at-



acks have put me under intolerable stress and have also been detrimental to Ellen's heart condition.

"The incessant intrusion into our family life has brought me to the recognition of strong personal reasons to stand down. Given our ages, the transition is best achieved now rather than five years down the line. It is time to plan our future life together without the stresses and long separations required by Parliament. I believe that I will be totally exonerated."

John Lyon, the Parliamentary Commissioner, launched a formal investigation into the MP's claims after a member of the public accused Mr. Cohen of defrauding the taxpayer by nominating the Colchester property, a converted schoolhouse, as his main home.

The Daily Telegraph later disclosed that the MP had also claimed thousands of pounds for redecorating at his second home before selling it and charging taxpayers £12,000 in stamp duty and fees for a new property.

Among his claims were a £25 sheepskin rug from IKEA, a £13 garlic press and tin opener, and £150 for a vase.

After moving his second home designation to a new home in his constituency, Mr. Cohen wrote to the Commons fees office asking permission to carry out a complete renovation of the kitchen at a cost of more than £3,000.

When his claim was initially turned down, he wrote a letter to officials saying: "This is my constituency home so the renovation is exclusively in connection with my Parliamentary duties." The claim was then paid.

(Source: Telegraph.co.uk)

Palin says she can outrun Obama in race

Sarah Palin, a 45-year-old former beauty queen who became the first woman and youngest person to be elected Alaska's governor, is featured in the August issue of the magazine for running aficionados.

Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin says she'd come out ahead if she went one-on-one with fellow jogger President Obama in a long run, according to an interview published online Tuesday.

"My one claim to fame in my own little internal running circle is a sub-four marathon" in Anchorage, she said, referring to her 2005 sprint in the Humpy's Marathon in which she beat the four-hour mark by 24 seconds. "What I lacked in physical strength or skill, I made up for in determination and endurance," she said.

The president, who stays fit by starting his day with a workout in the White House gym, is better known for his passion for basketball and has been a frequent golfer in recent weeks. Obama, however, recently acknowledged that he hasn't completely kicked his smoking habit, telling reporters that he does still "mess up" on his pledge to quit smoking.

Might Obama join the workout war of words? A message seeking comment Tuesday from the White House by The Associated Press wasn't immediately returned.



Palin, a 45-year-old former beauty queen who became the first woman and youngest person to be elected Alaska's governor, is featured in the August issue of the magazine for running aficionados. She was dubbed the country's "hottest" governor when she stole the show as U.S. Sen. John McCain's presidential running mate in 2008.

In the interview, she talks about her fondness for running, which is perhaps why the mother of five who gave birth to a baby boy last year is able to keep trim. The magazine on Tuesday published an extended version on its Web site. Palin said the exercise wasn't just a body thing and that it helps keep her emotionally and mentally in shape.

"I feel so crappy if I go more than a few days without running. No matter how rotten I feel before or during a run, it's always worth it to me afterward. Sweat is my sanity," Palin tells the magazine.

She said one of her biggest frustrations while campaigning with McCain was that the senator's staff didn't carve out time for Palin to get in a jog. But she recounted one memorable run at McCain's ranch in which she fell coming down a hill. The incident happened a few days before the debate with now Vice-President Joe Biden.

(Source: Foxnews.com)