

Tickets to 'Boots Ball' much in demand

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Competition to go to the hottest inaugural week party — the Texas Black Tie and Boots Ball — has led to a political scrap over Sen. Phil Gramm's decision to give some of the \$50 tickets to those contributing \$1,000 to his re-election campaign.

So intense is the fight for tickets that people have put ads in newspapers. One man was offered a free trip to Europe if he relinquished his tickets and others have reportedly scalped theirs for \$500 each.

Described as an event where you can "let your hair down, grab a beer and kick your boots off," this ball is a big draw this year because President-elect Bush, an adopted Texan, is expected to show up with 5,500 other guests.

Organizers initially planned for 4,500 people, but rented more space at the Washington Hilton to accommodate demand.

Unlike many events over the glittery inaugural week, the ball is not sanctioned by the official inaugural committee.

Instead, the bipartisan Texas State

Society, made up of Texans or would-be Texans, is hosting the Jan. 21 party as it has for the past two inaugurations. Democratic Rep. Charles Stenholm is the society's chairman.

At the center of the controversy is Gramm, a first-term Republican who is using the inauguration to raise money for his 1990 re-election campaign.

For a \$1,000 contribution, Gramm offered his supporters membership in the Gramm Senate Advisory Board. During inaugural week, board members are invited to a lunch with a Cabinet officer and attend a reception with VIPs. They were also given tickets to the ball, until supplies ran out, according to fund-raiser Brad O'Leary.

Meanwhile, President-elect Bush, seeking to "clear the mind for the decisions that lie ahead," went fishing off the Florida Keys on Friday after blaming refugee problems on tyranny in Nicaragua.

Bush was spending the weekend "in splendid isolation" at Islamorada pursuing "the wily bonefish" with a pack of fishing buddies including Treasury Secretary Nicholas F. Brady and Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo.