

Duke loses Louisiana; eyes national agenda



NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Gov.-elect Edwin Edwards, who turned fear of ex-Klansman David Duke into landslide victory and an unprecedented fourth term, appealed to his skeptics Sunday for the benefit of a doubt. Duke, meanwhile, looked to a national agenda.

"I hope this time people will look at me less with a jaundiced eye and recognize from time to time I may have a good thought," said Edwards, who has become known as a womanizer and gambler deft at skating on the edge of ethics and the law.

Unofficial returns gave Edwards 61 percent of the vote in Saturday's election. Nearly 1.7 million of the state's 2.2 million registered voters went to the polls, a statewide record 78 percent turnout.

Duke, a state representative and maverick Republican, won a majority of the white vote, despite his past leadership of a Ku Klux Klan group and support of Nazism.

"The people were told they would lose jobs, lose tourism," Duke said. "They were threatened with the loss of their livelihood if they dared to vote for me. At the end, they weren't prepared to undergo the sacrifices they'd have had to make or thought they'd have to make."

Black leaders rejoiced at church services Sunday, as did business executives who had warned in television ads and letters to employees that a Duke election would cripple tourism, convention business and future major sporting events.

Edwards' first three terms were marked by scandals, so much that the voters shunned him in 1987, giving the job to Buddy Roemer. But Roemer finished third in the Oct. 19 open primary.

Edwards, 64, forged a coalition of well-heeled, strange bedfellows whose only purpose was to discredit Duke, who said he drew contributions from all 50 states.

Edwards received 96 percent of the black vote, carried 45 of 64 parishes, similar to counties, and dominated every area of the state but the rural northeast.

On Sunday, Edwards appealed for support from Duke voters.

"I want to let them know I'm available to them," he said. "I'm as anxious as they are to make things better for everybody but not by stepping on someone else. Race-baiting, name-calling, Raging-baiting, problems are the fault of someone else, will not solve anything."

Duke told reporters in Baton Rouge he was defeated by a torrent of money that fueled ads and commercials filled with "biased hatred and economic blackmail."

"The money was everything," Duke said. "Tremendous power was brought to bear against us. The money was out in the streets for the black vote in great quantities."

He said he would not rule out a run for the presidency next year or as a candidate for Congress — or both.

"I will be talking, thinking about that over the next few days," Duke said.

Republicans, Democrats and black leaders around the country said they were pleased at Duke's defeat, whom both parties had repudiated.

"While we at the Republican National Committee do not celebrate a victory for the Democrats, we do happily accept the voters of Louisiana's decision to push away David Duke," said Republican National Committee Chairman Clayton Yeutter in Washington.

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