

One for the Ages

continued ▲ from Front

battleground state. Norma Storms, a 78-year-old resident of Raytown, said her driveway was filled with cars left by voters who couldn't get into nearby parking lots.

"I have never seen anything like this in all my born days," she said. "I am just astounded."

In some places the wait was longer than two hours.

"Well, I think I feel somehow strong and energized to stand here even without food and water," said Alexandria, Va., resident Ahmed Bowling, facing a very long line. "What matters is to cast my vote."

Some voting advocates worried that — tolerant voters or no — the nation's myriad election systems could falter late in the day, when people getting off work hit the polls.

"We have a system that wasn't ready for huge turnout," said Tova Wang of government watchdog group Common Cause. "People have to wait for hours. Some people can do that. Some people can't. This is not the way to run a democracy."

Ohio, which experienced extreme voting delays in the last hours of the 2004 election, had some jammed paper problems in Franklin County. "We're taking care of things like that," said elections spokesman Ben Piscitelli.

"But there's nothing major or systemic."

Perhaps the most bizarre barrier to voting was in Minnesota where a truck hit a utility pole in St. Paul's Merriam Park neighborhood. The accident knocked power out for about 90 minutes to two polling locations. Joe Mansky, Ramsey County's elections manager, said voting continued at those sites.

Election judges said the ballots were kept secure at one of the locations until the power was restored and the ballots could be run through an electronic machine, while a backup generator kicked in at the other site.

Late Monday, McCain's campaign sued the Virginia electoral board, trying to force the state to count late-arriving military ballots from overseas.

McCain, the Republican candidate and a POW during the Vietnam War, asked a federal judge to order state election officials to count absentee ballots mailed from abroad that arrive as late as Nov. 14.

Late Tuesday, the judge ruled he will hear the lawsuit on Nov. 10. He ordered election officials to keep late-arriving ballots until then.

Lawsuits have become common in election battles. The 2000 recount meltdown in Florida was ultimately decided by the Supreme Court.

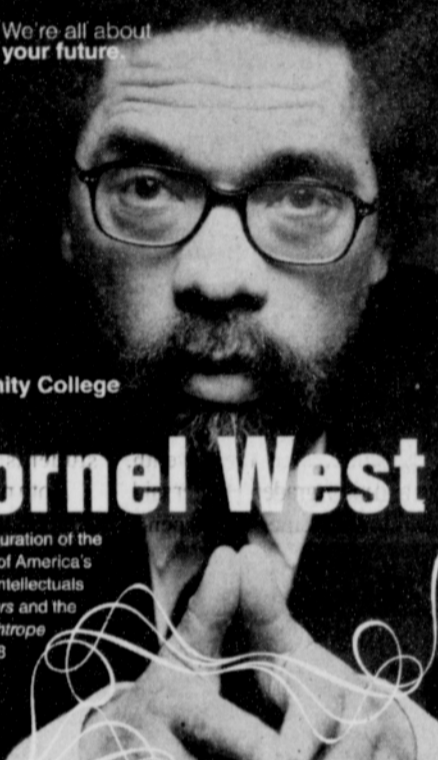


PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Voting for Obama

Barack Obama campaign workers give the thumbs up to Northeast Portland resident and Cannons Ribs Express restaurant owner Wayne Cannon as he drops off his election ballot Monday at the Obama campaign office on Northeast Killingsworth Street.

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First Black President Elected

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Overnight he became a sought-after surrogate campaigner, and he had scarcely settled into his Senate seat when he began preparing for his run for the White House.

A survey of voters leaving polling places on Tuesday showed the economy was by far the top Election Day issue. Six in 10 voters said so, and none of the other top issues — energy, Iraq, terrorism and health care — was picked by more than one in 10.

"May God bless whoever wins tonight," President Bush told dinner guests at the White House, where his tenure runs out on Jan. 20.

The Democratic leaders of Congress celebrated in Washington.

"It is not a mandate for a party or ideology but a mandate for change," said Senate Majority leader Harry Reid of Nevada.

Said Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California, "Tonight the American people have called for a new direction. They have called for

change in America."

Obama reached the 270 electoral votes he needed for election at 8 p.m. when NBC News projected that he would win California, Washington and Oregon.

McCain said he "recognized the special significance" Obama's victory had for African-Americans.

Addressing supporters in Phoenix, McCain said, "The American people have spoken, and they have spoken clearly."

"We both recognize that though we have come a long way from the old injustices that once stained our nation's reputation and denied some Americans the full blessings of American citizenship, the memory of them still have the power to wound," McCain said.

"Let there be no reason for any American to fail to cherish their citizenship in this, the greatest nation on Earth," said McCain, who pledged his support and help for the new president.

Obama's election was a broad one. He won Florida, the scene of so much electoral chaos in recent

elections. He won Ohio, a key to President Bush's two election wins. He won Colorado, home of the religious right. And he won Virginia, reversing 40 years of Republican victories there.

Surveys of voters as they left polling places nationwide encapsulated the historic nature of the victory by Obama, the son of a Kenyan father and a white American mother. As expected, he won overwhelmingly among African-American voters, but he also won a slim majority of white voters. He won among women and Latino voters, reversing a longstanding Republican trend. And he won by more than 2-to-1 among voters of all races 30 years old and younger.

That dynamic was telling in Ohio and in Pennsylvania, where McCain poured in millions of dollars of scarce resources. Obama won both, along with Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey and New York, all states with hefty electoral vote hauls, NBC News projected.

McCain countered with Texas and numerous smaller states, primarily in the South and the Great Plains.

In interviews with NBC News, aides to McCain said they were proud that they had put up a good fight in "historically difficult times."

A senior adviser said McCain himself was "fine" but that he felt "he let his staff and supporters down."

Obama will have a strongly Democratic Congress on the other end of Capitol Hill. The Democrats won strong majorities in both the House and the Senate. NBC News projected that the party would fall just short of a procedurally important 60 percent

"supermajority" in the Senate, however.

In the end, Florida, the scene of electoral chaos in recent elections, had little impact. Florida had been closely watched, but results there and in other closely contested states were delayed until after Obama clinched his victory as record numbers of voters flocked to polling stations, energized by an election in which they would select either the nation's first black president or its first female vice president.

Obama, who led in nearly all public opinion polls, and McCain both launched get-out-the-vote efforts that led to long lines at polling stations in a contest that Democrats were also hoping would help them expand their majorities in both houses of Congress.

Americans voted in numbers unprecedented since women were given the franchise in 1920. Secretaries of state predicted turnouts approaching 90 percent in Virginia and Colorado and 80 percent or more in big states like Ohio, California, Texas, Virginia, Missouri and Maryland.

At New Shiloh Church Ministries on Mastin Lake in Huntsville, Ala., Stephanie Lacy-Conerly brought along a chair, expecting to stay for hours.

"It's exciting," she said. "It's an historical moment."

Election officials around the country braced for problems, but only minor issues were reported. However, the McCain campaign filed suit in Virginia, home to several major military bases, complaining that absentee ballots were not mailed on time to many members of the military serving overseas.

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