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It May Hang on Ohio BUSH WINS FLORIDA, KERRY TAKES PA.

California's stem cell initiative leading in early returns



CRAWFORD: President and Laura Bush leave their polling place in Texas.

MARK WILSON Getty Images



BEDFORD: Sen. John F. Kerry and his wife, Teresa, arrive in Massachusetts at the end of the campaign trail.

JIM YOUNG Reuters



DIEDRA LAIRD Charlotte Observer

NO RAINOUT: Voters line up at a polling place in Fort Mill, S.C. From center to right, Roger Holcomb, Michele Holloman and Wanda Burfield put their newspapers to use for a wait in the rain. Despite wet weather in several areas, voter turnout was heavy nationwide.

By MARK Z. BARABAK
Times Staff Writer

President Bush and Sen. John F. Kerry were locked in a close battle for the White House on Tuesday, as the race balanced on the outcome in a handful of states for the second straight election.

With tens of thousands of ballots still to be counted, it was Ohio and its 20 electoral votes that appeared the most crucial, as the president stood just shy of the 270 electoral votes needed for victory. Bush was leading Kerry by about 3 percentage points in the national popular vote as of late Tuesday.

Wisconsin, Iowa, New Mexico and Nevada were also too close to call as of late Tuesday night.

With the economy, terrorism and the war in Iraq as driving issues, the election drew a huge turnout, forcing election officials to extend voting hours in several of the hardest-fought states.

Despite scattered problems, the balloting went smoothly for the most part. In Florida, the epicenter of the 2000 election fiasco, there were long lines but none of the glitches — like the infamous “butterfly ballot” — that clouded the results four years ago.

Democrats in Jacksonville were so pleased that they called the supervisor of elections, a Republican, to pay their compliments. “We couldn’t be happier,” said Duval County Democratic Chairman Clyde Collins.

The early returns shaped up the way most experts had predicted. Bush swept the South — including Florida — and carried West Virginia, the states of the Great Plains and Colorado.

Kerry secured his base in the Northeast and captured New Hampshire, a state Bush won four years ago. Kerry also won Maryland and Pennsylvania, a state the president had visited more than any other.

Kerry swept the West Coast, carrying California, Oregon and Washington state. He also won New York and Illinois, among the biggest prizes.

Both sides expressed confidence even as the outcome hung in doubt, mindful of how the last presidential race wound up in front of the U.S. Supreme Court after weeks of uncertainty.

“I believe I will win, thank you, very much,” the president told a group of reporters ushered in for a photo opportunity at the White House, where Bush and family members watched the election returns. “I feel good about it. . . . It’s going to be an exciting evening.”

Speaking to reporters in Boston, where the senator from Massachusetts was surrounded at home by his family, Kerry spokesman Mike McCurry told reporters, “At the end of the day, we win. I’m not sure what day, but we win.”

It was another long night for both sides — one in a succession, as the two candidates wrapped

up the campaign with a punishing final push that continued even after the polls had opened Tuesday.

His eyes puffy from fatigue, Bush started the day by casting his ballot at the fire station in Crawford, Texas, near his vacation ranch. Asked by reporters about the passions his presidency had stirred, Bush laughed.

“I take that as a compliment. It means I’m willing to take a stand,” he told reporters. As the president spoke, his wife, Laura, held his hand and stroked it with her thumb. “That’s why I’m comfortable about this election. I’ve given it my all,” Bush said.

[See Election, Page A16]

CONGRESS

GOP Keeps a Tenuous Hold on Capitol

Republicans run strong in South and threaten to unseat Senate Minority Leader Daschle.

By JANET HOOK
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — Republicans retained control of both the House and Senate in Tuesday’s elections, extending their decade-long domination of Capitol Hill as they swept up victories across the South and threatened to unseat Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota.

Republicans increased their control of the Senate, securing at least 52 seats in the 100-member Senate by picking up seats formerly held by Democrats in the Carolinas, Georgia and Louisiana. And they could increase their majority further if they were to win some of the contests that had yet to be decided by early this morning.

Democratic Party officials had conceded all along that they faced an uphill climb in their quest for a Senate majority because the most competitive contests were being fought in states considered to be Republican strongholds. But by midnight, they acknowledged that, even with many races yet to be decided, there was no string of victories left that would give them a majority.

“We’ve had a tough climb,” Sen. Jon Corzine (D-N.J.), chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, said on CBS. “I’m disappointed we’re probably not going to take it [See Congress, Page A20]

CALIFORNIA

Key Ballot Measures Going Gov.’s Way

By JORDAN RAU
Times Staff Writer

Wagering that embryonic stem cells could provide cures for the most disabling ailments, Californians on Tuesday appeared to favor creating a \$3-billion research effort that would be

the nation’s most aggressive.

Proposition 71 — the culmination of a 10-year-long effort instigated by venture capitalists, Hollywood stars and rich people with sick relatives — will swell the financial obligations of what is already the most indebted state in America. The proposition was ahead in early returns.

“All of us could have lived a hundred lifetimes and not had the opportunity to change the future of human suffering as the people of California have tonight,” said Bob Klein, a Fresno real estate developer who helped underwrite Proposition 71.

On one of the most crowded initiative ballots in California history, two of the most contested measures — to ease the state’s three-strikes law and require businesses to provide workers with health insurance — were locked in tight battles.

Early returns showed the electorate often in sync with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger as voters weighed the impressively diverse batch of 16 ballot initiatives. They made for the most expensive and intense campaigns during a year when the presidential race generally stayed clear of the state.

Californians overwhelmingly backed Schwarzenegger on his top priorities this election season: to defeat two measures that would have expanded gambling throughout California. Both [See Ballot, Page A24]

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THE VOTERS

Long Lines and Intense Feelings

By JOHN M. GLIONNA
AND JAMES RAINEY
Times Staff Writers

In the end, there seemed to be just one place to escape the din — just one place to get away from the blaring television ads, the robo-phone calls, the shouting television personalities and the chanting street-corner campaigners.

America found a refuge Tuesday at the polls. In record numbers — projected early in the evening at up to 121 million — voters turned up at churches, school multipurpose rooms, shopping centers and even funeral parlors to set about choosing a president.

So many people voted from Jacksonville, Fla., to Cleveland to Los Angeles that lines extended into the night. In Allegheny County, Pa., polls had to be kept open 90 extra minutes to accommodate all those who arrived before the planned closing hour. In Cleveland, a federal [See Voters, Page A17]

BUSH Electoral votes 249	KERRY Electoral votes 221	PENDING Electoral votes 68
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CALIFORNIA INITIATIVES

Expanded Indian gaming Prop. 70 Yes 23% No 77%	Three strikes Prop. 66 Yes 51% No 49%	Stem cell research Prop. 71 Yes 59% No 41%	Employer healthcare Prop. 72 Yes 49% No 51%
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47% of precincts reporting
All vote totals as of 11:30 p.m. Pacific time

NATIONAL HEADLINES



DOUG DREYER Associated Press

Tom Daschle: The Senate minority leader, shown with daughter Lindsay, is fighting for his political life in a tight race in South Dakota. **A20**

Same-sex unions: Voters in 11 states overwhelmingly approve ballot measures banning gay marriage. **A21**

TV coverage: Florida seems easier to call this time as networks try to avoid another reporting debacle. **A34**

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TIMES POLL

The National Fissure Remains Deep and Wide

By RONALD BROWNSTEIN
Times Staff Writer

After four turbulent and tumultuous years, the country remained divided about President Bush in Tuesday’s election almost as closely — and almost exactly along the same lines — as in his narrow and disputed victory in 2000, exit polls of voters found Tuesday night.

With a few key states still too close to call, Bush held a slight edge in another photo-finish election that sharpened the cultural divides that have increasingly defined American politics over the last generation.

The results underscored Bush’s success at consolidating his hold on his conservative base, and his difficulty in expanding much beyond it. However the race tilted in the end, the result appeared to change remarkably little from the historically narrow division in 2000. Through mid-evening, Bush and Democratic Sen. John F. Kerry had prospects of capturing only a handful of states that voted for the other side last time.

Once again the electoral map was starkly separated into red and blue, with Bush dominating the South, the Great Plains and [See Poll, Page A18]

