

Few Texans interested in primaries

Estimated 13 percent of registered voters cast ballots in elections

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — Texas was on pace to set a new low for primary election turnout as a meager 1.47 million of the state's 11 million registered voters were believed to have cast ballots Tuesday.

The projected turnout of 13.4 percent was the lowest in at least three decades, and it continued a downward trend for voter participation in the 1990s. The 20 percent (1.94 million) in 1996 and the 17.6 percent (1.59 million) in 1994 were the next lowest turnouts since 1970. Older data was not available Tuesday.

Political observers said the voter apathy could be traced to the lack of any real top-of-the-ticket

names. Gov. George W. Bush faced only token opposition in the Republican primary and Garry Mauro ran unopposed to claim the Democratic gubernatorial nomination.

"That makes the statewide primary resemble the municipal elections where people would rather watch grocery trucks unload than go vote," said political science professor Jerry Polinard of the University of Texas-Pan American.

Republican political consultant Mark Sanders added: "Texans are used to high-dollar, high-profile campaigns. They didn't get that this (election cycle). What they got was low-dollar, low-profile cam-

paigns and they just tuned out."

State officials saw it coming. Secretary of State Al Gonzales said Monday that turnout for early voting in the 10 largest counties was 1.15 percent for the Democratic primary and 1.17 percent for the Republican primary.

Still, he had projected a 20-percent turnout. He dropped that one-third about an hour before polls closed.

Final turnout figures won't be available until 100 percent of ballots are counted.

El Paso voter Al Villa said he figured it was the candidates that kept voters away.

"I think that's why there's a lot of

voter apathy, because candidates are not believable," Villa, a salesperson, said as he stepped out of an El Paso fire station and into a chilly but clear day. "They make a lot of promises during the campaign and then they get elected and what happens?"

Despite his stated distaste for politicians, the 60-year-old Villa said he was casting a ballot because he believes people have a responsibility to vote.

Marcie Johnston braved early morning single-digit wind chills in Lubbock for much the same reason.

"When you live in a community, it's just as important to vote in the local races as it is the state races,"

said Johnston, who joined a steady stream of bundled-up voters taking care of business early.

With few contested statewide races and little competition for seats in the U.S. House and state Legislature, the most heated West Texas battles were fought at the county level.

Others also were focused on local races.

Dick Wegner, 64, a Republican in Mercedes in far South Texas, said he had to vote in the Democratic primary if he wanted a say in his local government because most candidates for Hidalgo County judge were Democrats.

Incumbents lead Senate primary

AUSTIN (AP) — The only state senator facing a primary election opponent was in a tight race Tuesday.

Sen. Michael Galloway, R-The Woodlands, was one of only 16 incumbent lawmakers to face re-election challenges from within their own parties Tuesday. All but two were leading their opponents in early returns.

Rep. Ted Kamel, R-Tyler, was trailing Leo Berman, also of Tyler, 56 percent to 44 percent with votes in 2 percent of the district's precincts counted.

In Dallas, Republican Rep. Carolyn Galloway was running at 50 percent of the early votes against Kenn George.

No early returns were available from San Antonio's race between Republican Rep. Frank Corte and business owner Carrie Hammer.

In all, 148 current lawmakers were seeking their party nominations for another term in the Capitol. The majority faced no primary challengers and no opponents in November.

In the House, Republicans hoped to set up a slate of candidates for the general election that could take control of the chamber for the first time since Reconstruction.

Regardless of primary outcomes, a handful of seats in the House will be filled by first-time lawmakers after November following nearly a dozen incumbents' decision not to seek re-election.

Only one seat in the Senate is certain to be filled by a newcomer. Sen. Jerry Patterson, R-Pasadena, opted to run for the GOP land commission nomination rather than re-election.

Rep. Mike Jackson, R-LaPorte, and Democratic attorney Edward Wesley, of Texas City, face off in November for Patterson's seat. Neither faced primary opponents Tuesday.

The GOP in 1996 took a 17-14 majority in the Senate. They hope now to maintain — or expand — that majority while picking up control of the House.

The GOP says a major force in reaching its goals is popular Gov. George W. Bush, even though the Republican governor has remained mum on primary races.

The first-term governor easily won the GOP nomination for a second term, defeating one underfunded opponent in the primary and will face Democratic Land Commissioner Garry Mauro in November.

Court-election results lean conservative side in primary

DALLAS (AP) — All four incumbents on the Texas Supreme Court appeared headed toward nomination early in Tuesday's primary election.

If they can fend off their competitors in the November general election, the panel will retain its 7-2 conservative edge.

The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals also seemed to retain its conservative tenor Tuesday. The panel already has a 6-3 Republican majority. Both candidates for Place 3 are Republicans, ensuring at least a 7-2 majority.

In the race for Supreme Court Place 1, Republican incumbent Justice Craig T. Enoch will face Democratic challenger Mike Westergren in November. Both ran unopposed in their parties.

Democratic incumbent Justice Rose Spector will face one of two Republican challengers — Candace Tyson or Harriet O'Neill — in the general election for Place 2.

With 2 percent of the precincts reporting, Ms. O'Neill was ahead, 63 percent to Ms. Tyson's 37 percent.

GOP incumbent Justice Greg Abbott will face Democratic challenger David Van Os, a lawyer and lecturer, in November for Place 3. Both ran unopposed in their parties.

In the Republican primary for Place 4, Justice Deborah Hankinson was ahead of lawyer Steve Smith. With 2 percent of the precincts reporting, Hankinson led 57 percent to 43 percent for Smith.

The winner will face attorney Jerry Scarborough, the only Democrat running for the

seat, in the general election.

On the Court of Criminal Appeals, incumbent Judge Charles E. "Charlie" Baird, will try to fend off one of five candidates in November for the Place 1 seat.

Mike Keasler, a district judge in Prairie, led the field early with 37 percent. Ki Isaacs, a Dallas County prosecutor, followed with 22 percent.

Other Republicans running are Bryan Iron, a Bryan attorney; Houston lawyer Oliver; and Austin lawyer David Schaefer.

Nine people ran for Place 2, with lawyer Winston Cochran the only Democrat. Two Republican candidates went unopposed in early returns. Harvey Hudson, a district judge in Dallas, led the field with 27 percent, with Austin lawyer Cheryl Johnson second with 26 percent.

They're vying for the spot left by Morris Overstreet, a Democrat who died in Texas attorney general.

Other Place 2 candidates are Murry M. Moore, an assistant district attorney in Dallas; and Jeffrey B. Keck, a Dallas attorney. Two Criminal Court of Appeals justices, Forrest Lumpkin and John C. Moore, also are on the GOP ballot, as well as Worth lawyer William Harrison and Austin lawyer Jerry E. Smith.

In the Place 3 GOP primary, incumbent Judge Lawrence "Larry" Meyers was contending Herb Hancock, a Harris County prosecutor, 54 percent to 46 percent. A Democrat filed.

Mattox wins Democratic top lawyer slot

AUSTIN (AP) — Former attorney general Jim Mattox on Tuesday won the Democratic nomination to get his old job back.

Railroad Commissioner Barry Williamson took an early lead in a three-way GOP primary to be the state's top lawyer.

It appeared an April 14 runoff would be required to determine the Republican nominee.

The attorney general's race was crowded — drawing three Republicans and three Democrats — after Democrat Dan Morales decided against seeking a third term.

Mattox, a former congressman who left his job as the self-styled "people's lawyer" to run for governor in 1990, had 68 percent of the vote with 65 percent of precincts reporting.

He said going into the general election, he would focus on his record while attorney general.

"I'm very honored the people have remembered and given me this opportunity again," Mattox said from an election-night celebration at Scholz Garden, a longtime Democratic gathering place near the Capitol.

"The attorney general's office was set up as a watchdog agency.

"It's very clear my record shows I'm the best watchdog for the people of Texas," Mattox said.

Court of Criminal Appeals Judge Morris Overstreet, who eight years ago became the first black elected statewide in Texas, had 19 percent of the Democratic vote.

The third Democratic candidate was Gene Kelly, a lawyer who now has lost six bids for statewide office. He had 13 percent.

Williamson, the best-funded GOP candidate, had 40 percent of his primary's vote with 50 percent of precincts reporting.

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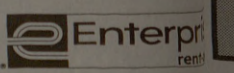
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