

Early celebration



PATRIC SCHNIEDER/THE BATTALION

Ber and Vincent Rosas celebrate while watching early returns at the Brazos County Democratic headquarters.

Texans go to polls in expected numbers

DALLAS — Texans came out to vote in large numbers Tuesday, some braving the wind, rain and even snow in the Panhandle.

Many turned out to support favored son Gov. George W. Bush for president, but others were firm in their support for Vice President Al Gore, the Democratic Party candidate.

"There's jobs now," said Ronnie Thomas, 44, after voting at an elementary school in southwest Dallas. "There's a job for anyone who wants to work."

It was treacherous work for some voters in the Panhandle region to get to the polls. Residents there awoke to at least 4 inches of snow and snow-packed roads in some areas could affect voter turnout.

Statewide, however, turnout was expected to be high. At 3 p.m. the Secretary of State office had not received any reports that would change initial predictions that about 7.5 million Texans — 61 percent of Texas' 12.3 million registered voters — would cast ballots. In the 1992 presidential race, 6.2 million people, or 73 percent, voted.

The turnout prediction is based on early voting totals from Oct. 23 through Friday, when at least 1.5 million of the state's voters cast early ballots.

Voters began lining up about 6:30 a.m. outside Lovers Lane United Methodist Church in the Preston Hollow section of North Dallas. Some came with coffee and cellular telephones in hand.

Not every Texan voted today in person, however. Two Dallas County voters cast their ballots via the Internet as part of a program administered by the Federal Voting Assistance Program. Stationed with the U.S. Air Force in Turkey, the military couple were the first in Texas to vote on the Web. Only three other states — South Carolina, Florida and Utah — had overseas personnel participate in the pilot project, which program managers hope to expand to broader populations of absentee voters.

It is almost certain that Bush, the Texas governor since 1995 and the Republican presidential nominee, will take Texas' 32 electoral votes.

Railroad commissioners return to oversee oil, gas

AUSTIN (AP) — Texas Railroad Commissioners Michael L. Williams and Charles R. Matthews returned to their jobs overseeing the state's oil and gas industry Tuesday.

Williams trounced Libertarian Anthony Garcia and Green Party candidate Charles Mauch, receiving 88 percent of the vote with 70 percent of precincts reporting. He becomes the first black to be elected to non-judicial statewide office.

"I am obviously deeply honored," Williams, 47, said Tuesday night. "I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the entire Bush family." Matthews defeated Libertarian Arroyon Fields and Green Party candidate Gary Dugger with 78 percent of the vote, with 70 percent of precincts reporting.

The three-member Texas Railroad Commission of Texas is the

oldest regulatory agency in the state and one of the oldest in the country. It was established in 1891 to regulate the rail industry of the 1800s. Since that time, the commission has been given responsibility for overseeing the activities of many different industries, primarily oil and gas.

Gov. George W. Bush appointed Williams to fill the unexpired term of Republican Chairwoman Carole Keeton Rylander, who was elected state comptroller in 1998.

Williams served as special assistant to Attorney General Richard Thornburgh at the U.S. Department of Justice in 1989 and served as a federal prosecutor in the 1980s. He was appointed by President George Bush as assistant secretary of education for civil rights at the U.S. Department of Education in the early 1990s.

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