



Perdue tops McCrory in race to lead N.C.

Lt. Gov. Perdue, already a familiar face in Raleigh, will become North Carolina's first female governor.

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Lt. Gov. Bev Perdue rode a national tide of Democratic support Tuesday to become the first female governor of North Carolina.

Perdue, who has held office in Raleigh for nearly a quarter century, was propelled into the governor's office despite a sweeping drive across the state and the nation for new faces and change.

With all 100 counties reporting vote totals, Perdue had just over 50 percent of the vote, while Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory, the Republican candidate, received about 47 percent of the vote. In Mecklenburg County, the seven-term mayor appeared to have lost by just under 400 votes; he had 48.9 percent and Perdue had 49.0 percent.

Libertarian Mike Munger, a Duke University professor, had almost 3 percent of the vote statewide.

"Thank you for making history tonight," Perdue told supporters in Raleigh.

McCrory conceded the race late Tuesday.

"I accept the voters' conclusions. We kept our promise and ran a positive and issues-oriented campaign," McCrory said in brief remarks at the Hilton Charlotte Center City, thanking his family and campaign. "I love my state. I love this city."

Perdue's narrow victory caps a 22-year career in state government and secures her party's hold on power in the state capital, with Democrats protecting their majorities in the House and Senate.

Perdue, 61, will be put to the test on Day One, taking command as the state plunges into its worst economic crisis in a quarter century.

The faltering economy played a surprisingly small role in the campaign. Perdue steadily pounded McCrory on a hodgepodge of non-financial issues, such as stem cells and landfills.

Nessie Moss, a Charlotte merchandiser, hesitated but chose Perdue.

"I considered voting for (McCrory), but he's done a lot of things I don't agree with for the city, like education and housing," said Moss, who voted in Charlotte's Wilmore neighborhood Tuesday evening.

The slumping economy weakens the chances that Perdue will be able to push through some of her proposals, such as tax breaks for seniors and tuition-free community college. She will also have to prove that she can break from the pack of powerful Democratic leaders such as Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight, with whom she's been associated for more than a decade.

"Revamping this state government is crucial if we're going to change the way we get our economy going again," Perdue said Tuesday night.

"After tonight there are no Republicans and independents and Democrats. We are all North Carolinians."



ETHAN HYMAN - (RALEIGH) NEWS & OBSERVER PHOTO

Lt. Gov. Bev Perdue celebrates her victory in the race to be N.C. governor at the Raleigh Marriott City Center on Tuesday evening.

Perdue's victory makes her the 30th woman to serve as a governor in the United States. She rarely spoke about the possible precedent but won in a state that didn't officially pass the constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote until 1970. In the 19th century, the first bill allowing women to vote was sent to the state legislative committee on insane asylums.

Democrats enjoyed their come-from-behind battle to parity in the presidential and U.S. Senate races, but Perdue's race gave some in that party more heartburn than they anticipated. Perdue spent more than \$15 million to McCrory's \$5 million in a race where Democrats enjoy a traditional advantage, but she struggled to deliver a consistent message.

Typically Democratic-leaning editorial pages of the state's major newspapers endorsed McCrory.

Former Gov. Jim Hunt, the lion of the state Democratic Party and Perdue's mentor, at one point reassured supporters that she was better than her campaign.

Early this morning, it appeared that McCrory lost his home turf of Mecklenburg County. With all 195 of the county's precincts reporting, Perdue had 49.0 percent of the vote to McCrory's 48.9 percent. Munger had 2 percent of the vote.

"The presidential race had a big im-

pact on us," McCrory said after his speech.

Was he surprised at possibly losing his home county?

"No," McCrory said, "because (Democrats) spent so much money here."

A native of Grundy, Va., Perdue adopted North Carolina as home in 1975 and 11 years later ran for the state House over the gender-driven dismissals of local Democratic leaders. During her years in the legislature, her first husband left her to juggle single parenthood with public office. She steadily climbed to higher levels of influence in Raleigh, working six years as one of the Senate's chief budget writers before running for lieutenant governor in 2000.

Perdue has two adult sons, who volunteered with the campaign, and she is married to businessman Robert Eaves, whose last name she adopted as her middle name.

On Tuesday voters promoted Perdue from the state's powerless No. 2 job to chief executive. She'll have to prove she's not in lockstep with her former Democratic colleagues in the Senate, where she served for a decade. Even governors and legislative majorities of the same party have clashed in the past, as North Carolina's governor's office is among the weakest in the nation. Lawmakers, through stat-



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With his wife, Ann, at his side, Mayor Pat McCrory concedes the governor's race at the Hilton Center City in uptown Charlotte on Tuesday night. McCrory lost his home county, Mecklenburg, by fewer than 400 votes.

ute and structure, maintain the upper hand in the balance of power within state government.

Perdue wasn't the only candidate pleased with the results. Munger said

he received more votes than any previous Libertarian candidate in North Carolina. "People are saying they're not satisfied with the choices they're being offered," Munger said.

ANALYSIS

Obama wave lifts other Democrats to statewide office

Straight-ticket voting and economy affect Senate, governor races.

BY JIM MORRILL

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Four years ago Mecklenburg County was a blue island in a sea of red.

It was the only large N.C. county to go for Democrat John Kerry, who lost the state by 12 points.

Tuesday, the sea turned blue. The same wave of Democratic turnout that took Barack Obama to apparent victory in North Carolina over Republican John McCain - he led by 1 percent of 4.1 million votes early Wednesday - lifted other Democrats to Congress and statewide office.

It helped Democrat Kay Hagan unseat incumbent Republican Sen. Elizabeth Dole and Democrat Bev Perdue beat Republican Pat McCrory for governor - even leading in his

home county.

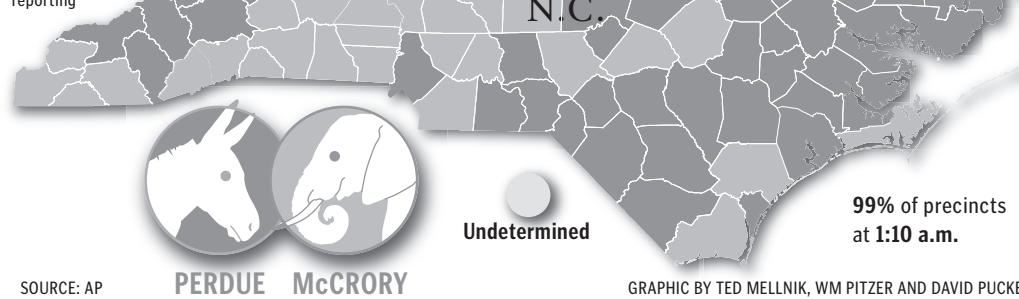
Obama won Mecklenburg, the Triangle and other urban counties, as well as a swath of southern counties in the 8th District that helped lift Democrat Larry Kissell over Republican Rep. Robin Hayes. Like other Democrats, he benefited from many urban voters casting straight tickets.

The wave was fueled by Obama's edge in money and organization, President Bush's unpopularity and widespread worry over the economy. It's a far cry from 2004, when Bush was so far ahead in the polls he pulled most of his campaign staff out of North Carolina by early October.

Since then the state has added thousands of residents from all over the country, most more interested in pragmatic politics than ideology. While McCain won rural and suburban counties, Obama won the urban counties.

N.C. Governor

Shaded counties have at least 70% of precincts reporting



"This state's economic change has riddled into its political character," said UNC Chapel Hill political analyst Ferrel Guillory.

Most statewide offices went Tuesday to Democrats, who cemented their hold on state government. McCrory was trying to become the first Republican governor since Jim Martin was elected 20 years ago.

Like his four predecessors, Charlotte Mayor McCrory tried to jump statewide. He had to win enough Democrats and independents in the Charlotte area to offset Perdue's support in Eastern North Carolina and straight-ticket voting by her party's base.

But the mayor, who has won seven terms with strong bipartisan support, ran behind Per-

due in Mecklenburg County. While McCrory carried most western counties, including those around Mecklenburg, Perdue carried Eastern North Carolina and big urban counties such as Wake, Guilford and Forsyth.

Twice as many Democrats as Republicans cast straight-party ballots. Many Democrats stuck with their party.

"Even though some of the people think McCrory will have Charlotte's best interests ... the overall ideology is important to me," said Jason Jenks, 38, a systems administrator at IBM.

Overall, exit polls confirmed what other surveys have shown: for most voters, the economy was the only issue.

An Elon University poll last week found 63 percent of North Carolinians considered the economy the state's biggest challenge. And by 47 percent to 39 percent they gave Democrats the edge in being able to handle it.

Obama, who raised more than \$600 million, was able to significantly outspend Republican John McCain in North Carolina. His campaign fielded more than 20,000 volunteers. — STAFF WRITER TED MELLNIK CONTRIBUTED.

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