

Primary wrapup: Gov. Brown to face Kashkari; plus more results and polling-place scenes

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Jerry Brown easily secured a spot on the November ballot Tuesday to seek a record fourth term as governor. His opponent will be moderate Republican Neel Kashkari.

With all precincts reporting, Kashkari, an investment banker and former Treasury official who voted for Barack Obama in 2008, held a lead of more than four percentage points lead over conservative Republican Tim Donnelly, an Assembly member from San Bernardino County with a penchant for controversial statements.

Late Tuesday night, Donnelly conceded the race to Kashkari.

But in a primary election with sparse turnout and lots of last-minute mail ballots, the outcome of many Valley races could remain unsettled well after Tuesday. This is the second time voters have decided races in a top-two primary -- and the first time statewide offices have been decided in that fashion.

Republican Party activists had feared a Donnelly victory, saying having him on the November ballot could undermine the party's efforts to attract minority voters and imperil chances for other Republicans, including several Valley candidates for state and congressional seats. Donnelly has been an outspoken opponent of illegal immigration.

In another statewide race with local interest, Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin topped five other candidates for state controller, netting 24.4% of the votes in the state elections office's final count just after 3 a.m. Wednesday. In Fresno, Kings, Madera and Tulare counties, Swearengin received slightly better than half of the votes.

Swearengin, who dropped in on a party Tuesday night at The Painted Table on Wishon and Olive avenues in Fresno's Tower District, was pleased but nervous with the early results.

"It's still a close race," she said. "I am still optimistic that I'll be in the top two but, honestly, this is really neck and neck."

Across the central San Joaquin Valley, voters were deciding a slew of local races, including top law enforcement offices in Fresno, Kings, Madera and Tulare counties.

In the bitter Fresno County district attorney's race, challenger Lisa Sondergaard Smittcamp beat incumbent DA Elizabeth Egan by 17 percentage points.

Kings County voters appeared to be ready to unseat incumbent District Attorney Greg Strickland, giving a 2-to-1 lead to challenger Keith Fagundes, a former Kings County deputy district attorney.

Tulare County voters gave Tim Ward a solid lead over challenger Ralph Kaelble for district attorney. And Mike Boudreaux was elected sheriff-coroner, beating challenger Dave Whaley by a nearly 3-to-1 margin.

But in Madera County, runoffs appear set for the district attorney and sheriff-coroner seats. Incumbent District Attorney Michael Keitz trailed challenger David Linn 36% to Linn's 44%. The third candidate,

Miranda Neal, drew about 20% of the votes. Meanwhile, Jay Varney and Michael Salvador were leading a field of six candidates seeking to replace Sheriff John Anderson, who is retiring. If they remain the top two candidates once any remaining ballots are counted, they will face a runoff in November.

State, Congress

Democrat Amanda Renteria, who has received money and backing from the national party, appeared to have a solid lead to reach the November ballot over fellow Democrat John Hernandez in the 21st Congressional District. But both were trailing incumbent Rep. David Valadao, the Hanford Republican who is trying for a second term. Valadao was leading with 64.2% of the vote to Renteria's 24.5%.

In the 26th state Assembly District, a pair of Republicans, Rudy Mendoza and Devon Mathis, were leading five other candidates for the right to appear on the November ballot. They are hoping to replace Assembly GOP Leader Connie Conway of Tulare, who is termed out.

And in District 32, which takes in Kings and part of Kern counties, Democrat Rudy Salas led with 43.0% of the vote and was headed to November against Republican Pedro Rios, who polled 34.9%. Republican Romeo Agbalog was out with 22.1%.

Fresno City Council

In the race for Fresno City Council District 1 seat, Cary Catalano and Esmeralda Soria will face each other in a November runoff, after leading five other candidates by wide margins. They are seeking to replace Blong Xiong, who is termed out.

Incumbents Oliver Baines in District 3 and Clint Olivier in District 7 appeared well ahead of their challengers and likely to win outright. Sal Quintero was unchallenged for a new term representing District 5.

Other Fresno County races

Two contests to replace retiring county supervisors appeared destined for runoffs in November, although in one case it could be close.

Farmer Buddy Mendes, who is seeking to replace District 4 Supervisor Judy Case McNairy, was running just short of the 50% plus one vote needed to avoid a runoff. Four other candidates were in the race.

In the District 1 race to replace Phil Larson, Kerman-area farmer Brian Pacheco appeared headed for a runoff against Fresno City Council Member Blong Xiong.

Incumbent County Assessor-Recorder Paul Dictos defeated challenger Mike Goossen, a newcomer who'd won the backing of Supervisors Debbie Poochigian and Phil Larson and county Auditor-Controller/Treasurer-Tax Collector Vicki Crow. Dictos, who has served in the role for four years, clinched more than two-thirds of the votes.

In the only Fresno County Superior Court judgeship race on the ballot, Deputy District Attorney Lisa Gamoian held a nearly seven percentage-point lead over former Deputy District Attorney Rachel Hill, but was far short of the votes needed to win the seat outright.

In the county schools superintendent race, incumbent Jim Yovino defeated Juan Sandoval.

Madera County

A runoff is certain in Madera County Board of Supervisors District 1. Mona Diaz was leading with 24.4% of

the vote, but Brett Frazier and Gary Johns were separated by only five votes after the first night of ballot counting was complete.

Madera County Supervisor Tom Wheeler easily defeated challenger Paul Cliby.

Kings County

In the race for Kings County Board of Supervisors District 3, one-term incumbent Doug Verboon of Hanford handily defeated challenger Holly Blair of Lemoore.

In District 4, farmer Craig Pedersen was ahead in a field of five, but still short of what he needed to win the seat. He'll face Justin Bond, a former Army sergeant. The seat has no incumbent because Supervisor Tony Barba did not seek re-election.

Both supervisorial races were dominated by the controversy about the California high-speed rail planned through Kings County and water supply worries.

In the race for Kings County Assessor/Clerk-Recorder and Registrar of Voters, Kristine Lee, chief auditor appraiser in the Tulare County Assessor's Office, was ahead in a field of four, followed by A. Renee Faber, Dan Chin and Ed Lopez.

Kings County Superintendent of Schools Tim Bowers was easily holding back challenger Tony Araujo, an educator.

Tulare County

Fifth District Supervisor Mike Ennis was leading three other candidates for another term on the county board, but his chances of avoiding a runoff were razor-thin with 50.1% of the vote and an unknown number of ballots still to be counted.

Porterville City Council Member Pete McCracken and newcomer Milt Stowe were leading by wide margins for two seats on the council.

Turnout sparse

At many Valley polling places, turnout was sparse. Some polling places with thousands of voters on the rolls had just a few hundred marking ballots by mid- to late afternoon.

Fresno County Clerk Brandi Orth said she is hoping turnout would hit 30%. As of Monday afternoon, county workers had collected mail ballots from nearly 13% of county voters. By Tuesday night, the tally of turnout had crept up to 17% and was expected to rise further as late-arriving mail ballots are counted.

Statewide, things weren't expected to be much better. The historic low turnout is 28.2%, and some election-watchers feared Tuesday's turnout might not reach even that.

At the voting booth inside Northside Christian Church on Nees Avenue in northeast Fresno, there had been no lines by 1:30 p.m. Only 20 people had voted by then, leaving Precinct Inspector Jeanne Weaver with time to read a mystery novel. She was given 260 ballots, she said.

Ben Genco, Weaver's 20th voter, said the district attorney and governor races brought him to the polls. "I'm a conservative and I did want to vote for the governor. I wouldn't mind getting Jerry Brown out of office, even though I know it won't happen."

Other voters said they were determined to make their voice heard.

Ida Jones always votes, and this election was no exception. "You can't complain about a democracy and how it works or doesn't work if you don't vote," she said after casting her ballot at San Joaquin Gardens on Fresno Street near Shaw Avenue.

At the polling station in Mount Olive Baptist Church at Thorne and Clinton avenues in central Fresno, Rob Del Pozo, 38, brought daughter Stella, 3, to watch.

"She wanted an 'I voted' sticker," Del Pozo said. "I like to get out and vote on every Election Day."

In Visalia, several voters said they were drawn to the polls by specific races -- the Tulare County district attorney's election, the governor's race or the contest for state superintendent of schools.

Lynette Haines, 55, also said she came to vote in the district attorney election, but declined to state her choice.

"I want to make sure all of our rights and needs are being protected," she added.

Fresno County tried drive-through voting at some locations, and it proved a hit with some voters.

"It's the Starbucks for your voting," said Niki Campos, a vote-by-mail drive-through clerk on the curb outside the Clovis Veterans Memorial District office on Hughes Street in Clovis.

Voter Lynne Cavanaugh said it was her first time turning a vote in by car. "I loved it," she said. Next election she will do the same, she said, or "mail it on time."

Compiled by Douglas E. Beeman with reports from staff writers Barbara Anderson, Rory Appleton, Marc Benjamin, Lewis Griswold, Mark Grossi, Hannah Furfaro and Brianna Vaccari.