

US ELECTION 2020

Biden gets the first vote from a Republican

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A lifelong Republican from Dixville Notch in New Hampshire has become the first American to cast a ballot on election day 2020 - voting for Democrat Joe Biden.

Voting just after the stroke of midnight on Tuesday 3 November, Les Otten continued a tradition dating back to the 1960 election of kicking off election day voting in Dixville Notch.

All the five registered voters who cast ballots at around the same time as Otten voted for Biden,



according to local media. Otten, a businessman and town "selectman" or administrator, said he was a "lifelong Republican voting for Joe Biden for president".

He told reporters that even as he doesn't "agree with [Biden] on a lot of issues", he believes "it's time to find what unites us, not what divides us."

Otten previously contested for the governorship in Maine in 2010 but lost out in a GOP primary.

He noted that his vote to Biden is "meant to send a message" to his fellow Republicans that their party "can find its way back".

"It's time to return to values our conservative party has held historically dear - limited gov't, balanced budget, support for working families and respect for personal rights and historically being at the forefront of racial justice dating back to when we were the party of Lincoln," said Otten.

He stated that "paradoxically" a Joe Biden presidency will allow them to "refocus on core Republican values" and they can become "the conservative party that can lead America to prosperity and greatness again."



A supporter attends the last campaign rally by Donald Trump at Gerald R Ford International Airport in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Supporters of Joe Biden take part in a drive-in campaign rally in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Biden will hold 2 more rallies in Pennsylvania on the Election Day.



PHOTO: REUTERS

No winner on election night?

Counting of more than 60m mail-in-votes, with different state rules, makes it probable that we might not get a winner tonight

AGENCIES

It has been a long tradition for US television networks to call projected winners on election night as results trickle in -- but the unique circumstances of 2020 are likely to create numerous challenges to that practice. In preparing for election night, some top US television news executives see a cautionary tale in a notorious November evening two decades ago.

After major networks projected Al Gore the winner in the crucial state of Florida, they pivoted in the wee hours to calling his Republican rival George W Bush the next president. The margin was so slim, Gore conceded, then took it back an hour later. The election wouldn't be decided for more than a month. The only loss that night was the networks' credibility.

"Decision desks" set up by media outlets to project winners of each state, which will determine the presidential race, are gearing up for a complicated election night amid uncertain timing for counting of mail-in and absentee ballots and fears about premature claims of victory.

More than 60m Americans have voted by mail. More than half of all mail-in ballots have come from Democrats, according to data from states like Florida, North Carolina and New Mexico where people register by party affiliation. Less than a quarter have been Republican.

Some fear an early tally based on votes cast in person on election day may prompt President Donald Trump to claim victory before absentee and mailed ballots are counted, opening up the potential for chaos.

In separate interviews with Reuters about their plans for election night, top executives at five major US news networks described a focus on restraint, not speed; on transparency about what remains unknown; and on a reassuring message that slow results don't signify a crisis.

Since the 2000 election, Florida has adopted many measures including allowing counties to start processing votes about a month before Election Day.

In 2018, the state made quick work of tallying up two major statewide races for governor and Senate that were decided by less than 1 percentage point.

And many states and counties have heard the message too and adapted processes, put in additional infrastructure, and are working hard to accurately count these large numbers of mail-in ballots quickly.

That does not mean we are in the clear. Trump famously won in 2016 on the strength of fewer than 78,000 votes combined in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Unlike Florida, officials in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania cannot start counting votes until election night and in Michigan, they cannot start until the day before the election.

The issue has received a lot of media coverage about the potential that the country will not know who wins on Election Day. That seems to be sinking in with the public, too, with a recent poll finding two-thirds of voters do not expect to know who will win on the night of the election.

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DONALD TRUMP'S PATH TO VICTORY

President Trump is, without question, an underdog -- and a clear one -- going into Tuesday's election. But, a long shot is not a no shot. And there is a somewhat plausible electoral map that gets him to 270 electoral votes and a second term.

Here's how: Give Trump the 125 electoral votes that are solidly in his camp, centered in the upper Plains states and the South. Then give him battleground states that have traditionally favored Republicans at the presidential level: Texas (38 electoral votes), Georgia (16), Ohio (18) and Arizona (11). That gets Trump to 208 electoral votes.

No Republican has won the White House in nearly a century

without winning Florida, and for Trump to win he needs the Sunshine State -- and its 29 electoral votes -- too. Which gets Trump to 237 total.

And while polls show Iowa (6) and North Carolina (15) quite close, Trump won them both in 2016, so give him the benefit of the doubt there. That's 258 electoral votes.

At which point, it would all come down to Pennsylvania, which appears to be the state in the upper Midwest that Trump carried in 2016 where he has the best chance of winning again. Win Pennsylvania and Trump is at 278 electoral votes, and a second term is his.

BIDEN'S EASIEST PATH TO VICTORY

Unlike President Donald Trump, who has a very narrow set of paths to get to 270 electoral votes, Joe Biden has a slew of ways to get to that magic number. Here's his easiest route to the presidency.

Start with the 203 electoral votes that are regarded as solidly in Biden's camp. Then give him Nevada (6 electoral votes) and Colorado (9) where demographics are trending hard away from Trump's version of conservatism. That's 218 electoral votes.

Now move the traditional Democratic states in the upper Midwest -- Minnesota (10), Michigan (16) and Wisconsin (10) -- for Biden. While Trump carried Wisconsin and

Michigan in 2016 -- and came close in Minnesota! -- there's little data that suggests he might repeat that feat on Tuesday. Trump is running closest in Minnesota of that trio, and, according to the Real Clear Politics polling average, he still trails Biden by almost 5 points. That's 254 electoral votes.

Which brings us to Pennsylvania and its 20 electoral votes. If Biden wins the state where he was born, that's 274 electoral votes -- and the White House. Such a scenario would allow Biden to lose Florida, Georgia, Texas, Arizona, Iowa and Ohio and still be elected president. Like I said, he's got a lot of paths to the White House.

BATTELGROUNDS: WHO IS AHEAD

Democrat Joe Biden leads in the national polls and most of the battleground states going into Election Day but President Donald Trump is insisting they're wrong and he'll repeat his upset victory of 2016. Here is a look at the latest national polls and polls in key battleground states:

NATIONAL POLLS

An average of national polls by the RealClearPolitics (RCP) website gives Biden a 6.7 point lead over Trump -- 51 percent to 44.3 percent. That is roughly in line with the averages of other leading outlets such as FiveThirtyEight.com, which has Biden up by 8.5 points nationally. Biden's lead nationally is more than double that of Hillary Clinton going into the 2016 election, when the polls were relatively accurate concerning the popular vote, which she won while losing in the Electoral College.

FLORIDA

In Florida, Biden has a one-point lead over Trump, according to the RCP average of state polls. A Siena College/New York Times poll has Biden up by three points in the Sunshine State but a Washington Post/ABC News poll has the Republican incumbent up by two points. Trump won Florida and its 29 electoral votes in 2016 and winning the state again is seen as crucial to his hopes of victory.

PENNSYLVANIA

In Pennsylvania, Biden has a 4.3-point lead, according to the RCP average of polls in the Keystone State, which has 20 electoral votes. Trump won Pennsylvania by just 44,000 votes in 2016 and his reelection hopes could hang on taking the state again.

MICHIGAN, WISCONSIN

Michigan and Wisconsin are two Midwestern states Trump won narrowly in 2016 but the RCP averages have him trailing in both this time. According to the RCP averages, Biden is up by 5.1 points in Michigan, which has 16 electoral votes, and by 6.6 points in Wisconsin, which has 10 electoral votes.

ARIZONA, NORTH CAROLINA

The battleground states of Arizona and North Carolina, both of which Trump won in 2016, are also being closely watched. According to the RCP averages, Biden has a one-point lead in Arizona, which has 11 electoral votes, while Trump leads by 0.6 points in North Carolina, which has 15 electoral votes.

GEORGIA, IOWA, OHIO, TEXAS

Four other states are also being closely watched this time -- Georgia (16 electoral votes), Iowa (six), Ohio (18) and Texas (38). Trump won all four states relatively easily in 2016 but the polls are showing close races there this time. Biden is up by 0.4 points in Georgia, according to the RCP average, a state Trump won by 5.1 points in 2016. Trump is up by 1.4 points in Iowa -- he won by 9.4 points four years ago -- and by 0.2 points in Ohio, a significantly smaller margin than his 8.1-point win last time around. Trump won Texas, one of the biggest prizes of the night, by nine points in 2016 but the RCP average gives him a narrow 1.2 point lead there ahead of Tuesday's vote.

SOURCE: AFP

Why the Senate contests matter?

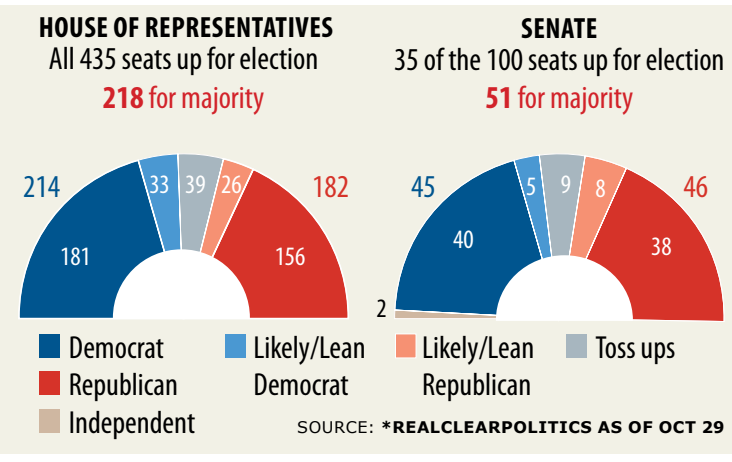
AGENCIES

When the dust settles after the November 3 United States elections, both major political parties hope they will have taken control of the 100-member Senate, a body that has outsized power in influencing American life beyond its legislative role.

Republicans currently hold a 53-47 majority in the chamber, but 35 seats will be up for grabs on Election Day. Twelve of those are currently held by Democrats and 23 are held by Republicans. Analysts generally favour Democrats' chances of taking control of the Senate, to which each of the 50 states elects two senators to serve six-year terms in staggered elections every two years.

The Senate and the 435-member House of Representatives together make up the US legislature, also known as Congress.

This election cycle, at least 14 Senate races are considered competitive, according to the Cook Political Report, with 12 Republican incumbents facing formidable challenges. Meanwhile, just two Democratic incumbents' re-election chances are considered imperilled.



Because the US vice president serves as a tie-breaking vote in the Senate, Democrats will have to win at least four seats to have a majority if President Donald Trump wins reelection. If Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden wins, the party will need to gain just three seats to take the majority because Kamala Harris, Biden's vice-presidential nominee, would become the tie-breaking vote.

Such a victory would represent a sweep for the party, as the House

is widely expected to maintain its Democratic majority.

Here's what else is at stake in the Senate elections.

LEGISLATION & INVESTIGATION

The Senate plays an important role in introducing and passing federal laws. Both the Senate and the House of Representatives must approve legislation before it is brought to the president to sign into law. The president, meanwhile, can veto that legislation. However, such a veto can be overruled by a three-quarters

majority vote in both chambers of Congress.

A party that controls the House, the Senate, and the presidency, therefore, has a rare ability to pass laws largely unencumbered by an opposing party. Those laws, however, are still subject to legal challenges.

The Senate, like the House, also has the ability to launch investigations into the Executive Branch on matters of public interest. It can also compel individuals, groups, or agencies to submit relevant documents to the investigation.

ADDITIONAL POWERS

Beyond passing laws and launching investigations, the Senate holds several more unique influential powers. Most notably, the chamber approves treaties and confirms cabinet secretaries, ambassadors, and federal judges, including life-serving Supreme Court justices, nominated by the president under its "advice and consent" role outlined in the US Constitution.

The Senate also conducts trials of federal judges and "civil officers" in the US government, including the president and vice president, if they are impeached by the House.

'We're not about to let anyone steal this election'

Battleground states officials reject pressure to declare winner early on election night

AFP, Washington

State law enforcement officials warned Monday against pressure to declare the winner of the US election, amid reporting that President Donald Trump has mulled claiming victory before votes are counted.

"States do not certify the election on election night," Michigan Attorney general Dana Nessel told reporters. "We're not about to let anyone steal this election."

"We have experience in handling close elections," Josh Stein, the attorney general of North Carolina, said in a briefing organized by the non-partisan Voter Protection Project.

"We may know the winner Tuesday night ... or we may not know the winner," he said.

If Trump declares victory prematurely, he added, "it would be unfortunate, but it really would be irrelevant."



The political news website Axios reported Sunday that Trump has told confidants he will declare victory right away late Tuesday if it looked like he was

ahead in the voting.

But officials in many states, such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania -- all key states where the outcome is unpredictable -- have said that counting the large numbers of mail-in votes could take at least another day and perhaps three days.

Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul said that because counting mailed ballots cannot begin in his state until Tuesday, it could easily take until Thursday for a result.

Trump called the Axios claim a "false report." But, he added, "I don't think it's fair that we have to wait for a long period of time after the election," and said the Republicans were going to "send in the lawyers" to challenge late results.

KEY LEGAL BATTLES THAT MAY SHAPE US POLLS OUTCOME

TEXAS DRIVE-THROUGH VOTING DUEL
A federal judge in Texas on Monday denied a bid by Republicans to toss more than 127,000 votes already cast at drive-through voting sites in Houston, a Democratic-leaning area. Similar challenges have been shot down by the Texas Supreme Court, most recently on Sunday. A lawyer for the plaintiffs said they would appeal the decisions. Harris County, home to about 4.7 million people, is the third most populous county in the United States.

MINNESOTA BALLOT DEADLINE EXTENSION NIXED
A federal appeals court on Thursday said Minnesota's plan to count absentee ballots received after Election Day was illegal, siding with Republicans in the battleground state. The court said the deadline extension was an unconstitutional maneuver. The 8th Circuit sent the case back to a lower court and instructed it to require Minnesota election officials to identify and "segregate" absentee ballots received after Nov. 3. Those ballots would not be counted if a final judgment is entered in the Republicans' favor.

WISCONSIN CAN'T COUNT MAIL-IN BALLOTS AFTER NOV 3
Wisconsin election officials cannot count mail-in ballots that arrive after Election Day, a conservative majority of the US Supreme Court ruled on Oct. 26. The 5-3 ruling left in place a decision by the 7th US Circuit Court of Appeals, which said it was too close to Election Day to make significant modifications to the voting process.

FLORIDA RESTRICTS EX-FELONS' RIGHT TO VOTE
The 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in September that Florida could require felons to pay fines, restitution and legal fees they owe before they regain their right to vote. Former felons in Florida are more likely to register as Democrats, according to an analysis published last month by the Tampa Bay Times, Miami Herald and ProPublica. Nearly 900,000 Floridians with felony convictions will be unable to vote in the election because of the decision.

NORTH CAROLINA BALLOT EXTENSION LEFT IN PLACE
The US Supreme Court on Thursday left in place North Carolina's extension of the deadline to receive mail-in ballots. The state election board, citing potential US Postal Service mail

delivery delays, opted to allow absentee ballots postmarked by Election Day to be counted if they arrived up to nine days later. The justices denied a request from Republican state lawmakers to put on hold an agreement made by state election officials that allowed the extension. One day earlier, the justices rebuffed a similar request by Trump's campaign and the Republican National Committee.

PENNSYLVANIA CAN ACCEPT MAIL-IN BALLOTS AFTER NOV 3
The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in September that officials in the closely fought state could accept mail-in ballots three days after the Nov. 3 election, as long as they were postmarked by Election Day. The US Supreme Court on Wednesday denied a request from Pennsylvania Republicans to review the decision on an expedited basis. The Supreme Court could still revisit the dispute and rule on the merits of the state court's ruling after the election. Republicans did prevail on one key issue at Pennsylvania's high court. Interpreting a state law, the court said officials must throw out "naked ballots" -- ballots that arrive without inner "secrecy envelopes."

SOURCE: AFP

India, Quad start key naval exercise

AFP, New Delhi

India, Australia, Japan and the United States started a strategic navy drill yesterday in the Bay of Bengal, with all four countries keeping a wary eye on China's growing military power.

The exercises -- with anti-submarine and anti-aircraft drills -- went ahead as India is embroiled in a deadly border showdown with China and has sought closer military ties with other countries.

The four nations make up the so-called Quad group (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), established in 2007 to counter growing Chinese.



Activists of Hindu Sena, a Hindu right-wing group, perform a special prayer to ensure a victory of US President Donald Trump in the elections, in New Delhi, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS