

RUBIO AND MURPHY SECURE FLORIDA'S SENATE PRIMARIES

TALLAHASSEE: Republican Sen Marco Rubio and Democratic US Rep Patrick Murphy each easily won their Senate primaries Tuesday, setting up a November showdown that's guaranteed to be nasty as each party grapples for a majority in the chamber. Rubio, who decided at the last second to seek a second term, easily fended off millionaire home-builder Carlos Beruff and Murphy used the backing of President Barack Obama and other Democratic leaders to defeat US Rep Alan Grayson, who was counting on his party's most faithful liberal voters to overcome Murphy's money and establishment support.

In other races, US Rep Corrine Brown lost a primary as she faces felony fraud charges. She was one of the first African-Americans elected to Congress from Florida since Reconstruction. US Rep Debbie Wasserman Schultz, who recently resigned as Democratic National Committee chair, won her primary - the first tough race since being elected to Congress in 2004. Rubio's and Murphy's victory speeches set the tone for the Senate race. "Marco Rubio is the worst of Washington because he puts himself first every time. He gave up on his job. He gave up on Florida. He earned the worst voting record for any Florida senator in 50 years," Murphy said shortly after polls closed. Rubio spoke about an hour later and said Murphy has lied about his education and his career and is only successful because of his wealthy father.

"How can someone with that kind of record think he can be elected to the US Senate? The answer is he has a sense of entitlement, because when everything you've ever had in your life is given to you, you think you deserve it all," Rubio said. Rubio had declared during his failed presidential campaign that he would not run again for Senate. But he nearly cleared what had been a crowded GOP field with his last-minute turnabout. Beruff rolled the dice to see if the anti-establishment mood powering Donald Trump's presidential campaign could send him to Washington as well. But after spending \$8 million of his own money and going nowhere in the polls, he essentially shut

down his campaign ahead of the primary.

"I voted for Marco only because I've been a longstanding supporter," said Diane Martin-Johnson, 66, after voting early Tuesday in Pinellas Park. "It's unfortunate he didn't do his job fully in Washington this term. I do think he deserves another chance. He thought he was doing the right thing (by running for president). That's my only complaint against him. He's a good man." Murphy, a former Republican, quickly earned party support and raised significantly more money. He was also backed by Vice President Joe Biden and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid. Grayson, a fiery liberal known for brash comments and hamstrung by a difficult divorce, relied mostly on small donors and feuded with party leaders.

Todd Martin, 53, and his 18-year-old daughter Haley, voted together in Tallahassee, where they recently moved as she starts college. They both chose Murphy, in part because they like his efforts to get government to address algae outbreaks near their former home in Vero Beach. "I grew up on the river and it's a shame what they let happen," Todd Martin said. "I like where Patrick Murphy stands on the algae. It's very important to me." More than 1.75 million Floridians already cast ballots by mail or at early-voting stations before polls opened Tuesday.

This year's primary turnout could top ones held in 2012 and 2014 - a sign that competitive races for Congress and the Florida Legislature could be driving up turnout this time around. Wasserman Schultz easily beat Tim Canova, a Bernie Sanders-backed law professor who was able to raise more than \$3 million in a primary colored by leaked emails revealing that DNC officials had worked against Sanders to favor Hillary Clinton in the presidential race. Brown lost to longtime state lawmaker Al Lawson, who has previously run for Congress. Democrats hope to gain seats in Florida's heavily Republican House delegation after court mandated redistricting chipped away the advantages of some incumbents. — AP



BOSTON: Ernestine Cuellar, of Boston's Charlestown neighborhood, raises her hands in prayer during a mass prayer rally on Boston Common held by evangelist Franklin Graham (inset) as part of a tour to urge evangelicals to vote. Graham's rally is a stop on his 50-state "Decision America" tour. — AP

PRAYER OR POLITICS?

EVANGELIST RALLIES CHRISTIANS IN BOSTON

BOSTON: The son of evangelist Billy Graham urged a gathering on the historic Boston Common on Tuesday to vote in the November election but stressed he was taking no sides publicly in the US presidential race. The event was the latest stop on the Rev Franklin Graham's 50-state Decision America tour, during which he asked Christians to take a pledge to support, whenever possible, candidates who uphold biblical principles.

Making no direct reference in his remarks to Republican Donald Trump or Democrat Hillary Clinton, Graham said the nation was in trouble spiritually, economically and politically and neither major party could turn that around. "I have no hope in the Democratic Party all right, zero hope," Graham said to some applause, adding quickly that before Republicans in the audience "high-five each other, I have no hope for the Republican Party."

Organizers of the event estimated the crowd at about 3,400 on the balmy late summer day. No official count was available. Similar rallies were scheduled this week in Providence, Rhode

Island, and Hartford, Connecticut. New England is believed to have proportionately fewer evangelical Christians than many other parts of the country. Less than 10 percent of Christians in Massachusetts identify as evangelical, according to recent estimates.

Boston Common, established in 1634 by the Puritan founders of the Massachusetts Bay colony, has often been called America's first public park. It has occasionally hosted religious-style events, including the first US Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II during his 1979 visit. While a smattering of Trump signs were evident Tuesday, many in the crowd echoed Graham's largely non-partisan theme. "This for me is spiritual, not political," said Robbie McNeerney, a Massachusetts native who was taking a break from missionary work in Vietnam.

McNeerney, who attended with his Vietnamese-born wife, Mihloan McNeerney, and their two young children, said he had not chosen between Clinton and Trump. "Neither of the political candidates can solve our problems," he said. "I think whoever is our next president will

need the grace of God." Daniel Hamil and his wife, Sarah Hamil, retirees from Bolton, said they had decided who to vote for but preferred not to say. They cited the nation's "moral decline" as their main concern. Speaking in the shadow of the Massachusetts Statehouse, Graham did not directly criticize state politicians but railed against progressives who he argued were taking away individual rights to religious expression.

Massachusetts was the first state to legalize same-sex marriage, and its current leaders are strongly pro-abortion rights. The pledge calls on voters to support politicians who uphold the "sanctity of life and the sacredness of marriage." Graham met with Trump last week during the Republican's visit to flood-ravaged parts of Louisiana. After the rally, Graham, who said he had known Clinton longer than he had known Trump, repeated his assertion he was not instructing people who to vote for. "Both parties, Democrat and Republican, have turned their backs on God and embraced secularism," he said. — AP



FLORIDA: Florida Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) speaks with supporters as he stops to thank volunteers at a phone bank on the final day before the Florida primary election in Miami, Florida. — AFP

JITTERS IN REBEL HEARTLAND OVER PEACE IN COLOMBIA

PLANADAS: Esperanza Rivera, who grew up in the same mountains that gave birth to the FARC guerrillas, is happy about the Colombian peace deal-but worries about what comes next. After nearly four years of negotiations, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the government of President Juan Manuel Santos reached an agreement in Havana yesterday to end 52 years of warfare. The deal needs to be ratified in an October 2 popular vote.

"What we want is for the peace deal to be signed and for the plebiscite to win," said Rivera, 41, a farmer interviewed in the town of Planadas, where a 1964 armed peasant uprising gave birth to the FARC. Rivera warns however that "another conflict, which no one talks about," is emerging, in a country where drug gangs have also fueled the violence. "As long as the guerrillas were here, criminals were kept away," Rivera said. "But now, since the criminals will have no one to fear, we will be unprotected." Police "do not come out to the countryside, there is no security force to defend us from common criminals," she said.

Not even a hen

In Planadas "the bandits greatly feared the guerrillas, so they wouldn't steal even a hen because there was someone to punish them." Rivera hopes that with peace they will also get "more help from the government, which has abandoned us." Another local, 59-year-old Jorge Ardila, said that he also wants peace but has doubts about what was negotiated. "I don't think that there is anyone in the universe that doesn't want peace," he said. "But before taking a stance I should know what was agreed upon."

Ardila claims that his father, Pedro Antonio Ardila, was a nurse for FARC founder Manuel "Tirofijo" (Sureshot) Marulanda, who died in 2008 of apparent natural causes. Ardila said that his father became Marulanda's nurse soon after the FARC was formed while working at the same time as an army nurse. "He would perform his medical services in the army and then, in a clandestine way, also help the guerrillas," Ardila said. Eustacio Jimenez, 75, is even more skeptical about the peace accord. "Reaching peace in Colombia is very

difficult because there is a lot of poverty and unemployment," he said.

Negotiations are fine, but there will be no peace if those issues are not also included in the bargaining, he said. Jimenez's prediction: "more blood will be spilled." According to Jimenez, there are "more people under arms than working in the field." A life-long farmer, Jimenez knows well the mountains surrounding Planadas, which for decades have been key corridors the FARC to reach other rural areas.

Power vacuum

Many locals are silent about their true thoughts about the future, wary of what could happen if they speak out. They conflict, which has left 260,000 dead and 45,000 missing, has forced them to hone their survival skills. "Here there are eight, nine sets of laws: those set by the guerrillas, the paramilitary groups, the gangs ..." a local who preferred to not identify himself said. Experts say the power vacuum that will emerge when the FARC demobilizes might be filled by other illegal groups. — AFP

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CALIFORNIA'S FARMWORKERS ON EDGE OVER OVERTIME BILL

MENDOTA: Many California farmworkers who make up the backbone of the nation's No 1 agricultural state were praising historic legislation that brings them closer to receiving the same overtime pay as the rest of the state's workers who are paid by the hour. If signed into law by Gov Jerry Brown, a new overtime bill would put California at the forefront nationally of farm labor pay and mark a victory in the fight to improve farmworkers rights in the decades old movement launched by Cesar Chavez, the legendary co-founder of the National Farm Workers Association who fought for higher farm worker pay.

Brown, a Democrat, has not said whether he will sign the law that would be the first of its kind for the United States. Florentino Reyes, 48, has been picking tomatoes and working a wide variety of crops in California's fertile

Central Valley for more than two decades and says he could make another \$60 weekly. That would give him more purchasing power to buy better food and clothes for his wife and three children and ease his stress over paying down bills. "For me, it's discrimination," said Reyes, finishing up Tuesday's harvesting of green tomatoes near the town of Mendota.

But other farmworkers are nervous about California farmers' claims that the higher overtime pay could hurt them economically and outprice California products from the marketplace in favor of crops grown in other states and countries. Gonzalo Najera, who drives a tractor on Salinas Valley's lettuce, carrots and broccoli fields, said some farmers are saying the extra overtime payments could drive them out of the state, but he doesn't buy the argument. "The growers

can't leave," Najera said. "They can't take their dirt with them." The 35-year-old father of four also has parents back in Mexico, who rely on money he regularly sends. He earns about \$33,000 a year and said he has worked seven days a week since March this year.

The added overtime pay he expects to receive will correct a longstanding injustice so farm workers are no longer treated as second class California employees, Najera said. Under the current law, California employers must pay time-and-a-half to farmworkers after 10 hours a day or 60 hours a week. Lawmakers in Sacramento on Monday sent the legislation to Brown that would give them overtime after eight hours in a day or 40 hours a week. It is backed by the United Farm Workers, which Chavez helped found in 1962, more than three decades before his death. — AP

