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Presidential race fuels unprecedented showing at polls; county cements its reputation as a GOP stronghold

Ozaukee County voters turned out at the polls in droves Tuesday, far exceeding the statewide turnout of 70%.

County officials report 89.6% of registered voters — 55,713 people — cast ballots. That's more than the 48,538 people who voted in the gubernatorial recall election this summer (77% turnout) and the 53,418 (75%) who voted in the 2008 presidential election.

The largest turnout was in two Mequon wards. Due to new registrations, they recorded a turnout of 109.3%, according to the county.

Other high turnouts included 96.6% in two Thiensville wards and 94.6% in the Town of Grafton.

In the Town of Port Washington, only 95 registered voters didn't cast ballots, according to the county. Town Clerk Jenny Schlenvogt said the 91% turnout was an all-time high, noting the previous high was 923 voters in the 2008 presidential election.

Schlenvogt said she had expected the turnout would be as high as 85% due to the attention candidates paid to Wisconsin and the fact that town residents are loyal voters.

"After receiving 225 absentee ballots, I expected a smaller crowd on election day itself, but that just wasn't the case," she added.

While officials reported the election ran smoothly, it took hours for the votes to be tallied in some places.

The Village of Grafton didn't complete its count until about 2 a.m. Wednesday, and returns from Dunwiddie Elementary School in Port Washington weren't turned in to the county until after 3 a.m. due to problems tabulating ballots, according to County Clerk Julie Winkelhorst.

The high turnout was generally attributed to interest in the presidential election and the hotly contested race between Senate candidates Tommy Thompson and Tammy Baldwin, but voters in the village and town of Grafton, also weighed in on a fire department referendum.

Voters in both communities agreed to spend $410,085 annually to upgrade the all-volunteer

department by a vote of 5,668 to 3,501.

Ozaukee County voters bucked the national trend in the presidential race, but followed tradition by voting Republican, casting 35,991 votes, or 65%, for Gov. Mitt Romney and 19,075, or 35%, for President Barack Obama.

Obama carried just one ward in the county. Village of Bayside electors living in Ozaukee County voted 46-36 for the president.

In the Senate race, voters picked Thompson over Baldwin, 35,375 (64.4%) to 18,213 (33.2%).

In the Congressional race, Republican Tom Petri received 35,550 votes (68%) to challenger Joe Kallas' 16,540 votes (31.7%).

County voters selected Republican Sen. Glenn Grothman over challenger Tanya Lohr, 17,492 (66%) to 8,977 (33.9%); Republican Rep. Jim Ott over challenger Cris Rogers, 14,610 (70.5%) to 6,089 (29.4%); Republican Rep. Duey Stroebel over Perry Duman, 17,884 (68.9%) to 8,041 (31%) and Republican Rep. Dan Knodl over Shan Haqqi, 4,212 (70%) to 1,800 (30%).

There were no contested local races, but a number of Republican county officials were re-elected to office.

District Attorney Adam Gerol garnered 42,283 votes, County Clerk Julie Winkelhorst 41,495; Treasurer Karen Makoutz 41,524 and Register of Deeds Ron Voigt 41,810.