



## **Election Still Too Close To Call In Race For U.S. President; NC Re-Elects Governor Cooper, Gives GOP Other Big Wins**

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North Carolina's 7,359,935 eligible voters followed those nationwide in unprecedented numbers casting ballots before Election Day, with 3,620,532 one-stop early votes cast by the 10/31 deadline and 977,186 mail-in ballots tallied by 5 a.m. November 4<sup>th</sup>. But as voting ended Tuesday night, 117,000 absentee ballots were outstanding, leaving many election outcomes unclear. The state's 15 electoral votes are still up for grabs in the race for President, and U.S. Senator Thom Tillis holds a thin margin over Democratic challenger Cal Cunningham to help determine if the U.S. Senate will remain under Republican control. In races for state offices, voters re-elected Democratic Governor Roy Cooper and made history in choosing Republican Mark Robinson as the state's first black Lieutenant Governor. Meanwhile, a coat-tail effect from President Trump's popularity, especially in rural parts of North Carolina, appeared to help Republicans win in several key Council of State races, including Catherine Truitt as the new State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and sweep all key judicial races. It also helped the GOP retain control of both the N.C. House and N.C. Senate and a majority of NC's seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. Here is a closer look at current election outcomes and remaining questions, based on unofficial results from the State Board of Elections:

### **President of the United States**

According to major national media networks, North Carolina ended Election Night as 1 of 9 states still to be called in the race for President between incumbent Republican President Donald Trump and former Democratic Vice President Joe Biden. Both candidates need 270 electoral votes to win, and as more results filtered in Wednesday and earlier today, the count stands at 253 for Biden and 214 for Trump, with 6 states still too close or too early to call, including Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina and Pennsylvania. Those states have 71 electors up for grabs, meaning a path to victory is still possible for either candidate. With deadlines in some of those states, including North Carolina, allowing votes to count if postmarked by Election Day, the outcome could still be unknown for a week or more. As of press time for this report, Trump was leading in North Carolina with 2,732,084 votes (49.98%) to Biden's 2,655,383 (48.57%). The vote difference of 76,701 could easily swing to either candidate as remaining absentee ballots are received and tallied by the state's Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> deadline for those ballots to be accepted.

## **U.S. Senate**

Democrats needed to pick up four seats to gain control of the 100-seat U.S. Senate. According to the *Washington Post*, they were defending two seats, in Michigan and Alabama, and their best hopes for an upset were in Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina, Maine and Iowa. Two races in Georgia are likely to go to a runoff. As of press time for this report, Republicans had lost one seat of their current majority but still held a 47-45 edge over Democrats, while 2 seats are held by other parties. NC Senator Thom Tillis's re-election bid is one key in determining control of the chamber, and like with NC's vote count for President, the outcome still could be swayed by roughly 117,000 absentee ballots still outstanding. Tillis currently leads this race with 2,640,379 votes (48.73%) over Democratic challenger Cal Cunningham, who has 2,543,672 votes (46.94%). Sen. Tillis declared victory on Election Night, but national media and the State Board of Elections have not called the race yet.

## **U.S. House of Representatives**

Most election forecasts predicted Democrats would retain control of the 435-seat U.S. House of Representatives. According to national media reports, that prediction held true, with Democrats claiming 227 seats to the GOP's 208. North Carolina holds 13 seats in that chamber, and unofficial election results show Democrats picking up only two additional seats in that delegation, with open-seat wins by former state Rep. Deborah Ross and Kathy Manning. The GOP retains an 8-5 edge over Democrats in NC's delegation. Winners of the U.S. House races in North Carolina include: District 1, G.K. Butterfield (D); District 2, Deborah Ross (D); District 3, Greg Murphy (R); District 4, David Price (D); District 5, Virginia Foxx (R); District 6, Kathy Manning (D); District 7, David Rouzer (R); District 8, Richard Hudson (R); District 9, Dan Bishop (R); District 10, Patrick McHenry (R); District 11, Madison Cawthorn (R); District 12, Alma Adams (D); and Ted Budd (R).

## **N.C. Governor**

Incumbent Democratic Governor Roy Cooper declared victory over his challenger, current Republican Lt. Governor Dan Forest, on Election Night, ending a divisive battle focused largely over handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in North Carolina and the timeline for reopening businesses and schools. Cooper garnered 2,803,782 votes (51.48%) to Forest's 2,563,258 votes (47.06%) for a margin adequate for sealing the win. Cooper will lead the state for the next four years, where he likely will continue his battles with the GOP-led General Assembly.

## **N.C. Lieutenant Governor**

A first-time candidate is poised to make history in becoming North Carolina's first black Lieutenant Governor, a role that holds a voting seat on the State Board of Education and serves as President and presiding officer of the NC Senate, where he can break tie votes if needed. GOP novice Mark Robinson garnered 2,773,751 votes (51.55%) over current state Rep. Yvonne Holley, who claimed 2,595,868 votes (48.34%). If the margin holds for Robinson as expected, he will be seated in January to replace current GOP Lt. Governor Dan Forest.

## **Other N.C. Council of State Races**

Republicans claimed the 3 open seats among the 10 that make up North Carolina's Council of State and will continue their 6-4 edge over Democrats on the Council, if outstanding absentee ballots do not change outcomes for any candidates. Open-seat gains for Republicans include wins by Mark Robinson for Lt. Governor, current state Rep. Josh Dobson for Labor Commissioner, and Catherine Truitt for Superintendent of Public Instruction. GOP incumbents retaining their seats include State Treasurer Dale Folwell, Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler and Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey. Rounding out the Council are 4 Democrats: Governor Roy Cooper (who leads the Council), Secretary of State Elaine Marshall, State Auditor Beth Wood, and Attorney General Josh Stein, who leads Republican challenger Jim O'Neill by roughly 10,000 votes. Outstanding absentee ballots, and possibly even recounts, could still impact that race or others on the Council, but recount eligibility cannot be determined until all votes are counted on the Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> deadline for absentee ballots to be received.

## **N.C. Senate**

Democrats hoped to win 5 additional seats to regain control of the state Senate, but election outcomes show they gained only 1 seat to keep the chamber under GOP control with a margin of 28-22, which is not veto-proof. According to an analysis by the NC Free Enterprise Foundation (NCFREE), the GOP retained all 20 seats classified as "strong Republican" and all 4 seats labeled "leaning Republican." They also secured 4 of the 6 "competitive" districts, including former Sen. Michael Lee's unseating Democratic incumbent Sen. Harper Peterson in their rematch for a seat representing New Hanover County. That race outcome could change as remaining absentee ballots are tallied, and a recount could be possible. Democrats secured only 2 of the 6 "competitive" seats, while holding 16 "strong Democrat" seats and 4 "leaning Democrat" seats. Of the latter, Sarah Crawford was able to flip a previous GOP seat in Wake County that had been redrawn in the last round of redistricting to lean more in favor of Democrats. Based on these election outcomes, current Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) is easily expected to continue as the chamber's leader for the next two years.

## **N.C. House of Representatives**

Democrats also had high hopes for retaking the majority in the state House, but Election Night results showed them losing ground instead. The GOP picked up 4 additional seats for a stronger, but not veto-proof, majority of 69 members compared to 51 for Democrats. The GOP cruised to this new margin of control by winning all 51 seats that NCFREE labels “strong Republican” and 7 classified as “leaning Republican.” In addition, they won 9 of the 14 “competitive” seats as well as 2 seats that “lean Democrat.” Of the latter, GOP candidate Erin Pare defeated current Democratic Rep. Sydney Batch of Wake. Other Democratic incumbents to lose seats, based on the unofficial returns, include Reps. Ray Russell of Watauga, Christy Clark of Mecklenburg, Joe Sam Queen of Haywood, and Scott Brewer of Montgomery. Democrats flipped only 2 seats to defeat current GOP incumbents, including Reps. Stephen Ross of Alamance and Perrin Jones of Pitt. Outcomes in those two races still could change as absentee ballots are counted, and either might head to a recount. Current House Speaker Tim Moore (R-Cleveland) is expected to seek re-election as the chamber’s leader for the next two years.

## **N.C. Supreme Court and Other Judicial Races**

With some races still too close to call, Republicans hold leads in all statewide Judicial races that were on Tuesday’s ballot. The top-of-the-ticket race for Chief Justice is neck-and-neck, with Senior Associate Justice Paul Newby, a Republican, holding a slim lead over current Chief Justice Cheri Beasley. Republicans Phil Berger Jr., son of the current state Senate leader, and former state Senator Tamara Barringer are poised to join the Supreme Court, if their leads hold. In addition, these GOP candidates are leading races to fill seats on the N.C. Court of Appeals: April Wood, Fred Gore, Chris Dillon, Jeff Carpenter, and Jefferson Griffin. The court makeup is especially important in resolving law, policy and power disputes between NC’s Democratic Governor and Republican-controlled General Assembly.

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