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Politics

Mayoral voter turnout strong across Boston

Many say choice pivotal to future; vote 'uneventful'

By **Peter Schworm** | GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 06, 2013

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SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

Sarah Oliver voted on Tuesday in Brighton with her rescue dog, Dixie, who appeared to be taking the vote very seriously.

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In the first mayoral election without Thomas M. Menino in a generation, Boston voters turned out in solid numbers Tuesday to elect his successor, with many saying they believed the choice was pivotal to the city's future.

“The next mayor will have big shoes to fill,” said Cecilia Cordova, 50, after casting a vote for Martin J. Walsh Tuesday morning in Chinatown.

“The city needs someone to take it to the next level,” said Imani Hill, 21, Cordova's daughter, who said she also voted for Walsh, a state representative, over his opponent, John R. Connolly, a city councilor.

Turnout was strong across the city, particularly in West Roxbury, parts of Dorchester, and East Boston, where the ballot included a referendum on whether to allow a casino at Suffolk Downs. Through the day, the number of voters outpaced turnout in the last mayoral election in 2009, when 31 percent of registered voters cast ballots.

Election officials said that the city was prepared for Tuesday's turnout and that voters faced minimal waits, with no snags.

"It's about what we expected," said Geraldine Cuddyer, chairwoman of Boston's Election Commission. "It was very uneventful."

Still, many said they expected more enthusiasm among the city's voters in the race to choose Menino's successor.

"There's a lot of interest," said James Lewis, an election warden in Charlestown. "It's just not what it should be."

Leone Smets, 62, said she was disappointed not to see more voters at her polling place in Chinatown, where she voted for Walsh on Tuesday morning.

"There should be a long line all day long," she said.

But even where voters were scarce, campaign volunteers were out in force at many polling places, trying to sway voters with last-minute pitches. In the North End, Connolly and Walsh supporters greeted many voters by name, urging them to support their candidate. Voters headed to the Codman Square Library in Dorchester witnessed the animated, if genial, argument between Connolly supporter James Horton, and Walsh backer Keith George.

"John's a man of great integrity, he knows city politics, as a city councilor he's done a great job, and as a teacher he's done a great job," Horton said.

"Martin Walsh grew up in our neighborhood," George countered as he handed out fliers written in Haitian Creole. "Marty Walsh knows the struggle that we have in this city, in this neighborhood."

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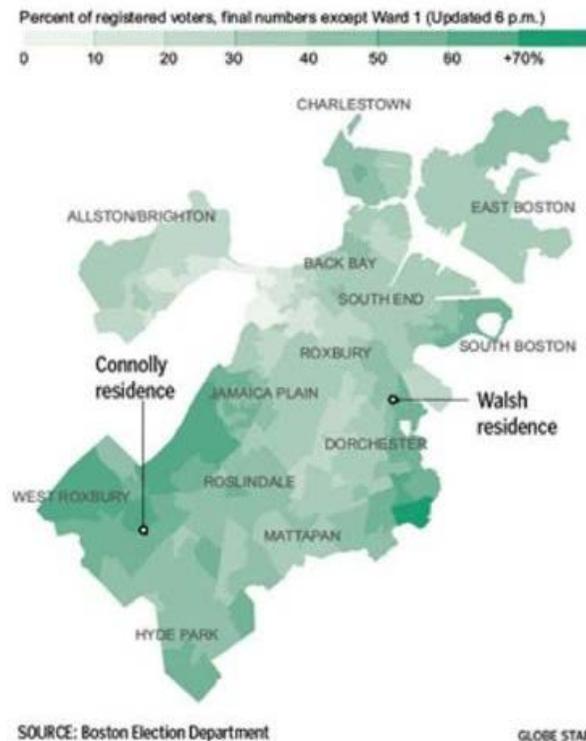
■ Coverage of the mayoral race



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'It's about what we expected. It was very uneventful.'

TURNOUT BY PRECINCT



Those who did make the trip to the polls said they were motivated by a variety of issues, chiefly education, public safety, and the economy.

“The young people with children seem to be voting for [John] Connolly, and the middle and elderly are all voting for Walsh,” said John Dillon, a 70-year-old retired union laborer volunteering for Walsh in Charlestown.

Derek O’Neill, a software engineer who has lived in Charlestown for five years, said he voted for Connolly mainly because of his education platform, particularly his support for more charter schools.

“My wife actually works at a charter school, and it’s doing really great things for the community in Dorchester,” said O’Neill, 28.

Charlestown native Denise Loehlein, 53, said Walsh’s background as a laborer and union leader drew her in. “I think it’s really important that it’s someone who’s going to fight for the blue-collar person,” she said, “for the little guy making minimum wage, or a little bit more.”

At the Curley Community Center in South Boston, where campaign volunteers for both candidates were out in force, Bethany Vaughn, 37, a former teacher who is now a stay-at-home mother, said she voted for Connolly after much consideration. “I’m a new parent, so schools are important to me,” she said. “I also think the violence in the neighborhoods is especially concerning.”

In Copley Square, Joan Christison-Lagay, a former teacher who now works in public health, said she was intrigued by Connolly’s plans to improve the schools and was a bit wary of Walsh’s union ties.

“He has his kid in the Boston schools,” the 66-year-old said of Connolly. “That was important to me.”

As voters across the city made their choice, many said they were already nostalgic for the Menino era, which spanned two decades.

“I’d rather vote for Menino,” Richard Gallagher, a 50-year-old painter, said at the Honan-Allston Branch Library, where morning voting was brisk. “He’s been a good mayor.”

Yet other voters said that it was time for a change and that the city would benefit from some fresh ideas. “I voted because I wanted a change, something new,” said Eric Garcia, 26, who voted for Walsh in Jamaica Plain. “I want to see a new generation of leadership.”

Even those who said they would miss Menino said they were ready for a new mayor.

“I think it’s time for the city to have new leadership and move ahead,” said Tanya Chakmakian of West Roxbury, her 6-year-old son Adam in tow. “Not that Menino has done a bad job; it’s just time for a change.”

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