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Hawaii News

Crowds send isle polls into overtime

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The line of voters at Kamiloiki Elementary School snaked around the buildings Tuesday with people waiting for voting machines. Pictured from front, Judy Toma with her 7-year-old daughter, Leila, and Matt Rosen with his daughter, Haley, also 7.

Long lines, a two-page ballot and the occasional malfunctioning voting machine caused frustration and delays for island voters on Election Day.

Despite setting a new record with 749,917 registered voters, only 55 percent of them actually voted.

In the 2012 general election by comparison, when President Barack Obama won re-election, 61.9 percent of the state's 705,668 registered voters cast ballots. During Hawaii-born Obama's first presidential election in 2008, 66 percent of Hawaii's 691,356 registered voters cast ballots.

Still, on Tuesday night, when the polls were scheduled to close at 6 p.m., 125 polling places out of 233 across the islands still had voters in line.

Chief Election Officer Scott Nago said voters needed extra time to review all of the choices on the two-page ballot, which included 20 county charter amendments on Oahu.

"It's double the length," Nago said as elections officials scrambled to figure out which polls were still open. "If voters don't study the ballot, it takes them longer to answer the questions."

Hawaii polling places remained open for would-be voters in line by 6 p.m. All of the polls finally closed and the first election returns were released at 7:45 p.m.

Voters also faced occasionally problems with machines Tuesday, and some gave up in frustration and did not vote for president and Honolulu mayor.

Some voters at Kamiloiki Elementary in East Oahu and Holomua Elementary in Ewa reported waiting more than 40 minutes, while others waited more than an hour at Kainalu Elementary in Kailua.

Some voters bypassed casting their ballots behind the privacy of a screen and instead voted atop cafeteria tables. Volunteers also ran low on blue privacy folders in some precincts.

The electronic voting machine at Manoa Elementary School malfunctioned and was down from 7 to 11 a.m., adding to the wait for people casting paper ballots.

After making her choices at Waimalu Elementary School in Aiea, Jill Hoffmann then found herself at the back of a line that snaked around the packed school auditorium just to get her ballot scanned.

After 15 to 20 minutes, Hoffmann estimated it would take her another hour to drop off her ballot.

"It was a large cafeteria, and the line completely went out around all four walls," Hoffmann said. "It was hot and there was no air conditioning. I couldn't wait that long."

So Hoffmann, 55, ended up not voting for the first time in 28 years.

"I vote every time except this one," she said. "I've never seen it this bad."

Nedielyn Bueno, spokeswoman for the state Office of Elections, said there were reports of long lines and occasional machine "hiccups" that were all resolved by so-called election troubleshooters.

Waipahu resident Frances Diocares, 24, said it was important for people to vote despite the hassles. "We should not take the right to vote lightly," she said.

Bueno said the polling station at Kapunahala Elementary School in Kaneohe opened late because poll workers couldn't locate the Hart eScan machine into which voters feed paper ballots.

"We had to deploy a troubleshooter to send a replacement machine," she said.

The Office of Elections also reported malfunctioning eScan machines at Aiea High School and the University of Hawaii Laboratory School. Voters at the Lab School were told to leave their ballots in a box and that they would be scanned later.

That wasn't good enough for one frustrated registered voter, Jamie Swan, who left the polling site with her ballot in hand. "I think it's understandable. Machines can go down," she told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser. "I've got the day off from work, so I'll take care of what needs to be taken care of. So I'll bring it back."

Hawaii County Clerk Stewart Maeda said some polling sites in both East and West Hawaii experienced problems with electronic voting machines that had to be resolved.

"All of our issues with our voting equipment (were) fine, and people seemed to be voting with no problem," Maeda said.

Of the 749,917 registered voters, nearly 270,000 people cast their ballots by early walk-in or absentee voting by Saturday's deadline. A total of 44,122 people took advantage of the early walk-in voting option, and 225,135 people mailed in their ballots.

The Associated Press and Star-Advertiser reporters Rosemarie Bernardo and Dave Reardon contributed to this report.
