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Glitches are the early front-runner in California

Some voters encounter locked doors and other delays as they turn out for the state's pivotal primary.

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Californians are turning out today -- possibly in large numbers -- to choose presidential nominees and decide the fate of seven ballot propositions and numerous local issues as some polling sites reported long lines and scattered glitches.

At least two Los Angeles-area polling places were shuttered this morning when voters showed up to cast their ballots. Joanna Ruhl, 25, waited more than an hour to vote at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Los Angeles, where the doors were locked until 11 a.m and voting did not get underway until shortly after noon.

"It's extremely frustrating," said Ruhl, who added that she felt fortunate to be off work today, whereas a steady stream of people arrived at the Santa Monica Boulevard church and then left.

At the Westside Jewish Community Center on Olympic Boulevard, officials didn't get voting equipment until 12:20 p.m. -- more than five hours after the polls opened.

Shirley Frazier, 58, a retired phone company worker, took the train from Long Beach, where she was baby-sitting her goddaughter, to cast her ballot. As she waited for the chance to vote, Frazier said she was reminded of the election irregularities during the 2000 presidential race.

"It's Florida all over again," she said.

Today's delegate-rich California primary is considered the campaign's biggest prize to date. Voting is also taking place in more than 20 other states, in what many consider to be the closest the country has come to a national primary.

Results in California are expected to be reported far later than usual this year because many counties are using paper ballots, which must be fed manually into scanners. Secretary of State Debra Bowen decertified the vast majority of electronic voting machines in the state last year, arguing that they were vulnerable to tampering and have defects that could mar vote counts.

As a result, about a third of California counties were scrambling to prepare for the primary, printing millions of paper ballots, acquiring new optical scanners and pressing into service scanners normally used to count absentee ballots.

Officials in the Barack Obama campaign expressed concern that some voters who chose not to state a party affiliation when they registered to vote -- but wanted to vote in the Democratic race -- might not realize that they had to request the Democratic primary ballot. In California, "decline to state"

voters may vote in the Democratic and American Independent primaries, though not in the Republican contest.

Stephen Kaufman, a Los Angeles attorney, said that if no request is made, "they will be pointed to the decline-to-state booth, which won't allow them to vote for anyone in the presidential primary."

The Obama campaign and state and local officials also expressed concern that such voters in Los Angeles County were not being instructed to fill in a bubble on their ballots that is required for them to be machine-counted. Kaufman said he and associates were working with Bowen and the county registrar-recorder's office to ensure that those ballots with unmarked bubbles would eventually be counted.

"If that does not happen, we will see a possibility of legal challenges taking place," Kaufman said.

At Santa Monica City Hall, inspector Eric Weinstein said that the day was mostly going well and that turnout was good. There was a small line out the door throughout the day.

Writer Clint Hummel, 33, voted for John McCain and said he hopes that eventually another Republican will win the White House.

"Arnold Schwarzenegger is the king of California, and frankly, he would be the best choice for president," Hummel said.

He said he voted in favor of state propositions that Schwarzenegger had endorsed and chose McCain because his maverick, moderate political style is most similar to the governor's.

But if McCain pushes for an indefinite stay in Iraq, Hummel said, he might vote for a Democrat come November.

"The Republican pool is pretty thin," he said. "The Democrats have some dynamic people, and if Clinton and Obama were to run together, that'd be a pretty strong ticket."

Silver Lake voter Pedro Mas Mayor was upset when he was asked to show identification at his polling place. Mayor, 69, a naturalized citizen who has lived in the United States since 1966, said this was the first time he'd ever been asked to show identification when voting.

"I told them it's the law that you aren't supposed to ask," Mayor said. "I said, 'Are you sure?' She said, 'Yes, you have to.' She insisted. So I showed my ID and said, 'I need a ballot.' "

Mayor said poll workers at the Sunset Boulevard Free Clinic were also asking white voters for their IDs. "They were asking everybody. I was a little upset, but I was able to vote," he said.

Chavez, the registrar-recorder spokeswoman, said the volunteer poll workers may have been confused about the law, which requires them to ask for ID only if the voter recently re-registered. First-time voters also are required to show proof of residency, she said.

In downtown Los Angeles, Pamella D'Pella, 50, an independent who voted Democratic today, drove to her new polling place at 1031 S. Hill St. to find that the only available parking carried a fee.

D'Pella said she saw one woman drive up to the parking lot and say, "I don't have the money." She

saw another person drive around the block, unable to find parking, and leave.

"If you don't have money, you can't vote," D'Pella said. "It broke my heart. It's really unfair."

For those who voted without incident, the choice came down to which candidate still in the contest best matched their own views.

At St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Monterey Park, evangelical minister Rich Katekawa, 38, cast a vote for Mike Huckabee, even though he doesn't believe that the former Arkansas governor will win the Republican nomination. Katekawa said he was moved by a speech Huckabee gave last year at a summit in Washington, D.C. "He's pro-life and pro-marriage," Katekawa said. "He best represents my views."

At Columbia Elementary School in El Monte, parents waiting for their kindergartners outnumbered the handful of people at the polls. Raymond Flores, 60, a retired business owner, said he was a Fred Thompson supporter until the "Law & Order" actor dropped out of the race. Now Flores supports Republican Mitt Romney. The candidate's work on the Salt Lake City Olympics and his position on immigration were key to his decision, Flores said.

"I would probably be even stricter on immigration than Romney," Flores said, adding that he had family members from Mexico who came to the U.S. without authorization. "We need stricter enforcement of the laws that are on the books, and I think Romney will do that."

Tasha Toruno, 23, sported her "I Voted" sticker on a hot-pink Che Guevara T-shirt. Her vote went to Obama, but "he wasn't my first choice," the emergency medical technician said. She said she had been a John Edwards supporter because she admired the former North Carolina senator's focus on issues affecting the working class and the poor. At Hollenbeck Park in Boyle Heights, a late-morning crowd of about two dozen voters filed in and out of the community center. Many of them said healthcare and the war in Iraq were the most prominent issues in their minds. Support for Hillary Rodham Clinton was strong among those in the crowd, many of whom said they decided early on to back her because they were supporters of her husband, former President Clinton.

Maria Hernandez, 53, who was born in Jalisco, Mexico, said she cast her first vote as a naturalized citizen for Bill Clinton. "He was a confident president; she will be too," she said.

Retired food worker Elodia Gamez Parra, 72, and accountant John Betancourt, 46, said their strong support for Bill Clinton pushed them to vote for his wife. Betancourt said his mother, father and two sisters all felt strongly about both Clintons. Only one brother dissented from the family to support Obama.

At midday, voting at the Woodland Hills Academy auditorium was going smoothly except for a scheduling mix-up in which music class performance had to be relocated to the library. Sasha Williams, 33, a software consultant from West L.A., said she used to be a Democrat but did not register with a party this time because she was dissatisfied with her options. But she took an early lunch break anyway to vote for Obama because she said he seemed fresh and likable, even though she disagreed with his approach on immigration.

Williams voted against all the state propositions and said she was particularly unhappy with Proposition 93 on term limits.

"It's a trick, just allowing certain members to selfishly stay where they are," she said. "If they

haven't learned how to do their jobs by now, they deserve to leave."

Los Angeles city voters also weighed in on Proposition S, a measure to lower a city tax on telephone calls from 10% to 9% while extending it to cover all calls regardless of the technology.

In Highland Park, Rosa Rocha, 52, a native of El Salvador, said she voted for the proposition.

"Nobody likes taxes, but if it will help the city, it's OK," Rocha said.

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