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# Perdue tops McCrory in race to lead N.C.

**Lt. Gov. Perdue, already a familiar face in Raleigh, will become North Carolina's first female governor.**

By Mark Johnson

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Bev Perdue celebrates her win Tuesday, capping a 22-year career in state government. SARA D. DAVIS – ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Lt. Gov. Bev Perdue rode a national tide of Democratic support Tuesday to become the first female governor of North Carolina.

Perdue, who has held office in Raleigh for nearly a quarter century, was propelled into the governor's office despite a sweeping drive across the state and the nation for new faces and change.

With 95 of the 100 counties reporting vote totals, Perdue had just under 50 percent of the vote, while Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory, the Republican candidate, received 47 percent of the vote.

Libertarian Mike Munger, a Duke University professor, had almost 3 percent of the vote.

"Thank you for making history tonight," Perdue told supporters in Raleigh.

McCrory conceded the race late Tuesday night.

"I accept the voters' conclusions. We kept our promise and ran a positive and issues-oriented

campaign," McCrory said in brief remarks at the Hilton Charlotte Center City, thanking his family and campaign. "I love my state. I love this city."

Perdue's narrow victory caps a 22-year career in state government and secures her party's hold on power in the state capital, with Democrats protecting their majorities in the House and Senate.

Perdue, 61, will be put to the test on Day One, taking command as the state plunges into its worst economic crisis in a quarter century.

The faltering economy played a surprisingly small role in the campaign. Perdue steadily pounded Republican Pat McCrory on a hodgepodge of non-financial issues, from stem cells to landfills.

Nessie Moss, a Charlotte merchandiser, hesitated but chose Perdue.

"I considered voting for (McCrory), but he's done a lot of things I don't agree with for the city, like education and housing," said Moss, who voted in Charlotte's Wilmore neighborhood Tuesday evening.

The slumping economy weakens the chances that Perdue will be able to push through some of her proposals, such as tax breaks for seniors and tuition-free community college. She will also have to prove that she can break from the pack of powerful Democratic leaders such as Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight, with whom she's been associated for more than a decade.

"Revamping this state government is crucial if we're going to change the way we get our economy going again," Perdue said Tuesday night.

"After tonight there are no Republicans and independents and Democrats. We are all North Carolinians."

Perdue's victory makes her the 30th woman to serve as a governor in the United States. She rarely spoke about the possible precedent but won in a state that didn't officially pass the constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote until 1970. In the 19th century, the first bill allowing women to vote was sent to the state legislative committee on insane asylums.

Democrats enjoyed their come-from-behind battle to parity in the presidential and U.S. Senate races, but Perdue's race gave some in that party more heartburn than they anticipated. Perdue spent more than \$15 million to McCrory's \$5 million in a race where Democrats enjoy a traditional advantage, but she struggled to deliver a consistent message.

Typically Democratic-leaning editorial pages of the state's major newspapers endorsed McCrory.

Former Gov. Jim Hunt, the lion of the state Democratic Party and Perdue's mentor, at one point reassured supporters that she was better than her campaign.

Early this morning, it appeared that McCrory might lose his home turf of Mecklenburg County. With 193 of 195 precincts reporting, Perdue had 49 percent of the vote to McCrory's 48

percent. Munger had 2 percent of the vote.

“The presidential race had a big impact on us,” McCrory said after his speech.

Was he surprised at possibly losing his home county?

“No,” McCrory said, “because (Democrats) spent so much money here.”

A native of Grundy, Va., Perdue adopted North Carolina as home in 1975 and 11 years later ran for the state House over the gender-driven dismissals of local Democratic leaders. During her years in the legislature, her first husband left her to juggle single parenthood with public office. She steadily climbed to higher levels of influence in Raleigh, working six years as one of the Senate's chief budget writers before running for lieutenant governor in 2000.

Perdue has two adult sons, who volunteered with the campaign, and she is married to businessman Robert Eaves, whose last name she adopted as her middle name.

On Tuesday voters promoted Perdue from the state's powerless No. 2 job to chief executive. She'll have to prove she's not in lockstep with her former Democratic colleagues in the Senate, where she served for a decade. Even governors and legislative majorities of the same party have clashed in the past, as North Carolina's governor's office is among the weakest in the nation. Lawmakers, through statute and structure, maintain the upper hand in the balance of power within state government.

Perdue wasn't the only candidate pleased with the results. Munger said he received more votes than any previous Libertarian candidate in North Carolina.

“People are saying they're not satisfied with the choices they're being offered,” Munger said.

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