



# Bush carries Electoral College after delay

## Democrats challenge Ohio vote, push back official certification

**WASHINGTON (CNN) -- President Bush officially won a second term in the White House after electoral votes from all 50 states were counted Thursday during a joint session of Congress.**

The normally perfunctory ceremony of counting and certifying Electoral College votes was delayed for about four hours as Democrats unsuccessfully challenged Ohio's votes for Bush.

Bush received 286 electoral votes, 16 more than the 270 he needed to win re-election. Sen. John Kerry, a Massachusetts Democrat, received 251 votes. One Democratic elector cast a vote not for Kerry but for former Sen. John Edwards, his vice presidential running mate.

In the vice presidential race, Vice President Dick Cheney received 286 electoral votes and Edwards received 252.

Alleging widespread "irregularities" on Election Day, a group of Democrats in Congress objected earlier Thursday to the counting of Ohio's 20 electoral votes.

The challenge was defeated 267-31 by the House and 74-1 by the Senate, clearing the way for the joint session to count the votes from the remaining states.

The move was not designed to overturn Bush's re-election, said Ohio Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones and California Sen. Barbara Boxer, who filed the objection.

The objecting Democrats, all of whom are House members except Boxer, said they wanted to draw attention to the need for aggressive election reform in the wake of what they said were widespread voter problems.

In a letter to congressional leaders Wednesday, members of the group said they would take the action because a new report by Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee found "numerous, serious election irregularities," particularly in Ohio, that led to "a significant disenfranchisement of voters."

"How can we possibly tell millions of Americans who registered to vote, who came to the polls in record numbers, particularly our young people ... to simply get over it and move on?" Tubbs Jones said at a press conference with Boxer.

Thursday's joint session of the House of Representatives and the Senate to count electoral votes is specified in the U.S. Constitution. Cheney, in his role as president of the Senate, presided over the session.

The results from each state, read in alphabetical order, were ticked through quickly until

Ohio was called, and a clerk read the objection filed by Boxer and Tubbs Jones.

Then, as required by congressional rules in the event that at least one member of each house objects to the vote, Cheney ordered the lawmakers back to their respective chambers for two hours of debate on the merits of the challenge and to vote on it.

It was only the second such challenge since the current rules for counting electoral votes were established in 1877. The last was in 1969 and concerned a so-called "faithless elector," according to congressional researchers.

Four years ago, after the disputed election results in Florida, members of the Congressional Black Caucus attempted to block Florida's electoral votes from being counted.

In a scene recalled in Michael Moore's movie "Fahrenheit 9/11," lawmaker after lawmaker was gavelled down by Vice President Al Gore because no senator would support the objections, as the rules require.

House Democrats involved in this year's protest worked for weeks to enlist the support of a senator in their party, and Boxer agreed to join the effort Wednesday.

"This is my opening shot to be able to focus the light of truth on these terrible problems in the electoral system," Boxer told the joint press conference with Tubbs Jones.

"While we have men and women dying to bring democracy abroad, we've got to make it the best it can be here at home, and that's why I'm doing this."

Republicans dismissed the effort as a stunt, noting that specific allegations of voting problems in Ohio have been investigated by journalists and, the Republicans said, found to be untrue.

"But apparently, some Democrats only want to gripe about counts, recounts, and recounts of recounts," said Rep. Deborah Pryce, an Ohio Republican.

"So eager are they to abandon their job as public servants, they have cast themselves in the role of Michael Moore, concocting wild conspiracy theories to distract the American public."

White House press secretary Scott McClellan dismissed the challenge as "partisan politics."

"The election is behind us," he said. "The American people now expect their leaders in Washington to focus on the big priorities facing this country."

Kerry released a letter Wednesday saying he would not take part in the protest.

"Our legal teams on the ground have found no evidence that would change the outcome of the election," Kerry said.

Bush carried Ohio by more than 118,000 votes -- the Buckeye State win providing the margin of victory in the Electoral College race. The president received 286 to Kerry's 252 electoral votes.

"There are very troubling questions that have not yet been answered by Ohio election

officials," the senator said.

"In the coming months I will present a national proposal to ensure transparency and accountability in our voting process."

Kerry was not on hand Thursday. He is in Iraq to thank U.S. troops for their service.

*CNN's Ted Barrett contributed to this report.*

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