

Pensacola Beach tweaks new vacation rental rules before vote

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Florida on track for historic vote

Will state elect first Black gov., or will Dems return from long exile?

John Pacenti
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Either way, history will be made in Florida when the votes are counted at the end of one of the most significant midterm elections in state history.

Will Floridians elect their first Black governor in Republican U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds, or will the Democratic Party with David Jolly end three decades in exile and break through in a cycle that offers a unique opportunity that may not come again for years?

Will the economic policies of President Donald Trump, with record-low approval ratings, serve as an anvil for the GOP, sinking them not only in some top-ticket races but also in congressional contests, dooming its Amendment 3 property tax initiative, and ending the Republican supermajority in the state Legislature?

Or will the 1.5 million-voter registration GOP advantage — built by Gov. Ron DeSantis during the pandemic — serve as a firewall to upstart candidates Democratic gubernatorial candidate David Jolly and U.S. Senate contender Angie Nixon?

Analysts were trying to discern the wild cards. Would it be the Trump factor or maybe independents that would be the deciding factor?

Aubrey Jewett, a political science professor at the University of Central Florida, said that, given the GOP voter advantage, the Florida 2026 midterm has been surprising.

"It looked like there wouldn't be much competition or excitement in Florida elections until the situation changed, and lo and behold, it's possible the situation may have already changed," he said. "The wild card is I don't think anybody a year ago would have perceived President Trump to be in such a slump."

Republican advantages face unexpected test by early Democratic turnout

Florida turned ruby red and voted for Trump by 13.1 points in 2024, but the midterm — at least before the votes are counted — has been competitive. Even DeSantis' and the Florida Legislature's attempt to gerrymander the congressional districts is now being called a "dummymander" that

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Workers run a logic and accuracy test on election machines in Pensacola on Oct. 1. Pre-marked ballots are run through tabulators to make sure they are counting each vote accurately. GREGG PACHKOWSKI/PENSACOLA NEWS JOURNAL

Escambia, Santa Rosa break midterm record

In-person early voting numbers ever for area

Jim Little Pensacola News Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Escambia and Santa Rosa counties saw record turnout for in-person early voting ahead of Election Day.

The number of people who cast ballots in person during the early voting period was the highest it's ever been for a midterm election year since Florida started allowing early voting in 2004 in both Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.

Escambia County saw 46,194 people vote in person during the early voting period that ran from Oct. 19 through Oct. 31, and Santa Rosa County saw 33,499.

The numbers reflect a shift in how people are choosing to vote early, with fewer people opting for mail-in ballots than in previous midterms.

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As early voting winds down, Escambia County Commission candidates continue with nonstop campaigning for the closely watched District 4 seat. TONY GIBERSON/ PENSACOLA NEWS JOURNAL

Builder sues to eliminate Santa Rosa impact fees

Tom McLaughlin
Pensacola News Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Developer Edwin Henry, who has long opposed efforts to implement impact fees on contractors as a means of offsetting the cost of development on local infrastructure, is suing Santa Rosa County in an effort to halt further assessment of the fees.

It took years of effort, but in 2024 the county finally brought together a Board of County Commissioners willing to overcome developer resistance to establish the fees and, as the Henry lawsuit notes, begin levying them in May 2025.



Henry

The lawsuit, filed in early October, claims imposition of the fees has created "a new financial burden" on contractors by adding costs that range from $789 to $1,846 per dwelling unit.

"Henry Homes and Edwin Henry are both damaged by the impact fees and have been required to pay fees totaling over $85,000 as a condition of obtaining building permits," the Henry complaint states.

It seeks a preliminary injunction to halt the county's collection and calls for a final judgment that would do away with the impact fees altogether.

What Edwin Henry's impact fee lawsuit claims

In the lawsuit, attorneys for Henry and his business claim that their clients suffer irreparable harm each time they are required to pay the "unlawful" impact fees, and that the fees put a damper on housing construction and affect affordability.

It also claims that a law passed in Florida known as the Hurricane Relief Act, signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis on June 26, 2025, voids the 2024 ordinance establishing impact fees in Santa Rosa County.

The law prohibits counties that were included in federal emergency

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