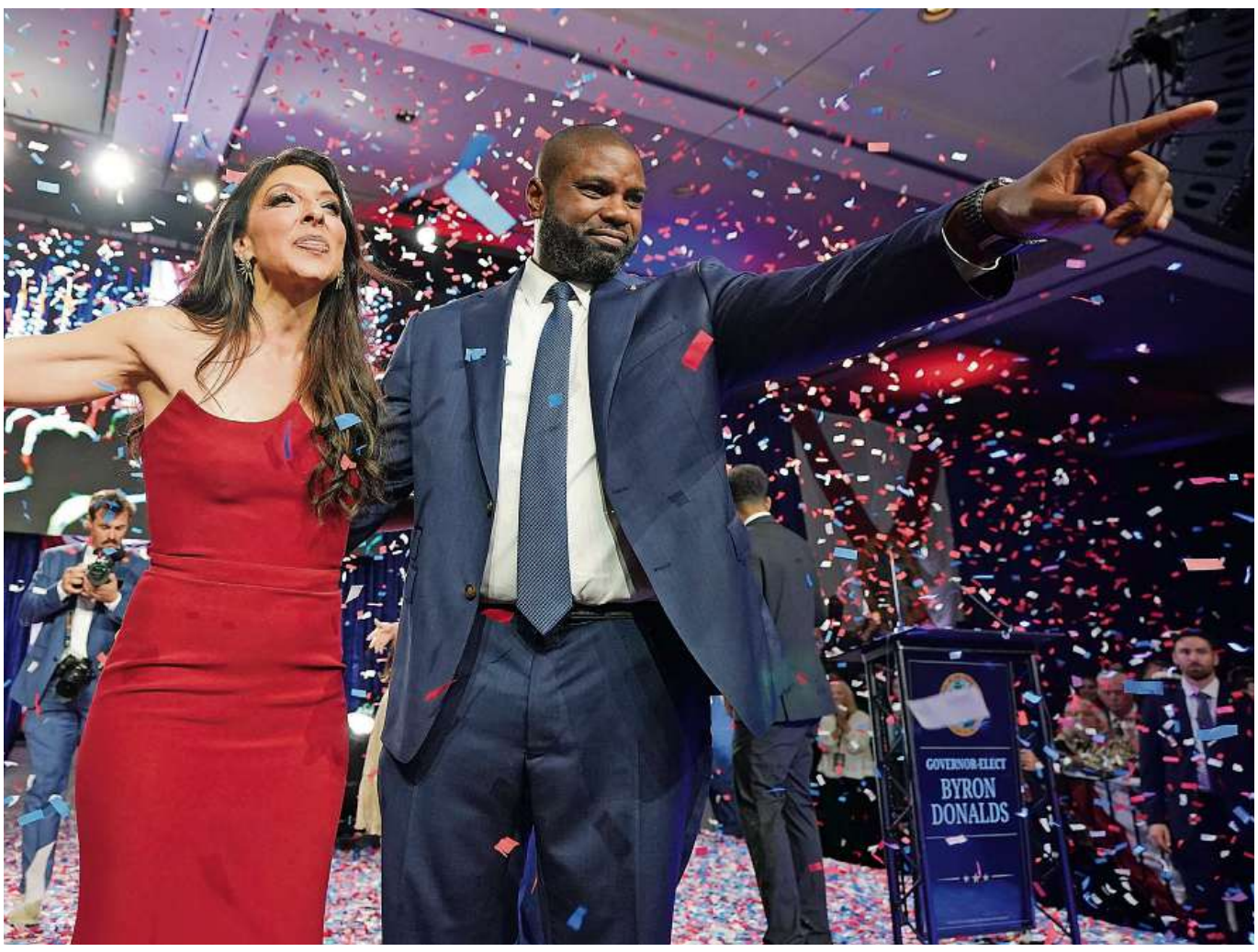
Tampa Bay Times

FLORIDA'S BEST NEWSPAPER | tampabay.com | ★★★★ Wednesday, November 4, 2026

Midterm Election 2026



Byron Donalds and his wife, Erika, celebrate his election Tuesday at his watch party at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Hollywood. Donalds had the backing of President Donald Trump. *(REBECCA BLACKWELL | AP)*

'ONLY IN AMERICA'

Byron Donalds narrowly beats Democrat David Jolly to make history as Florida's first Black governor. Now he says his mission is to make sure people can build a great life in the state.

BY MICHAEL VAN SICKLER AND LAUREN PEACE
Times Staff Writers

HOLLYWOOD — U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds won more than half of the vote Tuesday, enough to enter his name in history books as Florida's first Black governor and extend nearly 30 years of uninterrupted Republican rule in the state.

Boosted by an endorsement last year from President Donald Trump and a massive funding advantage that came with it, Donalds fended off Democrat David Jolly, a former Republican U.S. representative from Pinellas County who has become a prominent cable TV pundit.

At about 9:30 p.m., Donalds came out amid rapturous applause from more than 300 supporters at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino. He told them that Jolly and Trump had just called him. He thanked Jolly for running a "hard-fought" race. He thanked Trump "for being in my corner."

While Donalds, who turned 48 last week, has said he would be humbled by the historical significance of becoming the first Black governor of Florida, the subject didn't come up in a victory speech that lasted less than 10 minutes.

Later, asked by a reporter about the milestone, Donalds paused and appeared moved by the question.

"It's actually just starting to sink in, man," he said. "Only in America, our state is phenomenal. We really have great people throughout this state."

But he did strike a conciliatory, almost bipartisan note that is unfamiliar to most

See DONALDS, 6A

GOP wins most US House seats in bay area

But Democrat Kathy Castor keeps her Hillsborough district despite redrawn boundaries.

BY SHAUNA MUCKLE AND MAX CHESNES
Times Staff Writers

When all the votes are tallied, Tampa Bay will have helped decide who controls the U.S. House.

After Gov. Ron DeSantis and state Republicans redrew Florida's congressional map, a number of districts became hot battlegrounds. In four races, Democrats fought to hold on to seats redrawn to favor Republicans. In a few others, Democrats worked to claim seats deep in President Donald Trump's territory on the heels of his historically low approval ratings.

In Tampa Bay's congressional races, Republican incumbents held on to their seats by much narrower margins than in 2024. And in Hillsborough's District 14, Democratic Rep. Kathy Castor maintained her grip on a redrawn seat where registered Republicans now outnumber Democrats.

In District 13, which covers parts of Pinellas and Pasco, GOP Rep. Anna Paulina Luna

See HOUSE, 10A

Crist unseats Welch in blowout St. Pete mayor's race

The former governor and Congress member will now lead his longtime hometown.

BY COLLEEN WRIGHT AND NICOLAS VILLAMIL
Times Staff Writers

Thirty-six minutes after the polls closed Tuesday, St. Petersburg Mayor Ken Welch conceded to challenger and former Florida Gov. and U.S. Rep. Charlie Crist.

With all the city's precincts counted, Crist dominated with 62% of the vote, compared with Welch's 38%.

Crist, 70, will be the next mayor of the city he has called home since he was 3. He starts a new chapter of a storied political career that launched in St. Petersburg four decades ago and peaked with his time as governor from 2007-11.

Welch stood to lose by a wider margin than when he was elected. He won the 2021 race, becoming St. Petersburg's first Black mayor, with 61% of the vote.

"To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven," Welch opened his speech, quoting the Bible. "It was a blessing for me to serve as mayor of my hometown for a season, for an extended season of five years, and we hoped for an extension of that service for one more term. But the voters have made a clear choice, and they selected a different mayor to move us forward."

Crist hosted his election night watch party at The Birchwood ballroom in downtown St. Petersburg. Packed with 100 guests —

See CRIST, 7A



St. Petersburg Mayor-elect Charlie Crist, with fiancée Chelsea Grimes, addresses supporters at his election night party at The Birchwood in St. Petersburg. *(DIRK SHADD | Times)*

Amendment 3 approved, property tax changes coming

The cuts ahead could cost local governments billions without service cuts or other tax boosts.

BY ROMY ELLENBOGEN
Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — In a year when the cost of living is front of mind for voters, Floridians approved a constitutional amendment that would significantly cut property taxes for people who own the homes they live in.

Amendment 3, which is expected to save Florida homeowners thousands and cost local governments billions, passed with about 62% of the vote. It needed at least 60% to be approved.

Its approval means Florida's tax and budget landscape is set to dramatically change as early as January.

Under the amendment, the homestead exemption for all non-school taxes will rise to $150,000 in 2027 and $250,000 in 2028.

Homestead exemptions reward Floridians who live in

See AMENDMENT, 7A

More election coverage

Democrats control both chambers of Congress, **2A**

Pasco Sheriff Chris Nocco wins Fla. Senate seat as local Republicans hang on, **9A**

Moody defends U.S. Senate seat, beating Democratic challenger Nixon, **10A**

Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco county school board and commission results, **11A-12A**

St. Pete voters elect two new council members, approve new tax, **12A**

Full election results, **13A**

Ballot measures test Trump's agenda, **14A**

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