

AP survey: More than 3.4 million new voters

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Voter excitement, always up before a presidential election, is pushing registration through the roof so far this year — with more than 3.5 million people rushing to join in the historic balloting, according to an Associated Press survey that offers the first national snapshot.

Figures are up for Blacks, women and young people. Rural and city. South and North.

Overall, the AP found that more than one in 66 adult Americans signed up to vote in just the first three months of the year.

And in the 20 states that were able to provide comparable data, new registrations have soared about 65 percent from the same three months in the 2004 campaign.

Voters are flocking to the most open election in half a century, inspired to support the first female president, the first Black or the oldest ever elected.

Also, the bruising Democratic race has lasted longer than anyone expected, creating a burst of interest in states typically ignored in an election year.

Some Democratic Party leaders bemoan the long battle, with two strong candidates continuing to undercut each other. But there are clear signs that the registration boom is favoring their party, at least for now.

"This could change the face of American politics for decades to come," said Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas, predict-



Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama has been responsible for getting millions of new voters registered.

ing permanent gains for her party. Republicans, concerned at least somewhat for 2008, say these surges come and go over the longer term.

While detailed data is available from only a handful of states, registration seems to be up particularly strongly for Blacks and women.

Among the new voters in North Carolina is Shy Ector, 25, of Durham. She favored Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry while a student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill four years ago, but never actually took the time to make sure she was registered to vote. Barack Obama's candidacy was enough to make sure she did this year, she said.

"I was like, 'Oh, now this is a reason to vote. This is different,'" Ector said.

"I was inspired and I was excited."

More racist emails out in federal suit

WASHINGTON (AP) — A man suing the Secret Service for racial discrimination has sent offensive emails of his own, according to new evidence filed in court.

The court documents include emails sent by plaintiff Reginald Moore, who is Black, containing a joke about a Black woman hitting her daughter and a picture of a wedding reception at a White Castle hamburger restaurant. The Secret Service declined to talk about the recent filings.

This is the latest twist in an eight-year-old racial discrimination case against the Secret Service. A group of Black employees say the agency has passed over Black agents for promotion. They say White colleagues and supervisors regularly use

a racial epithet to refer to criminal suspects and Black leaders of other countries. The lawsuit claims the Secret Service has always had a discriminatory culture — a claim the agency has consistently denied.

Last month an employee found a noose in one of the Secret Service's training centers. A worker who tied the noose out of canine training rope has since been placed on administrative leave, according to the agency.

As part of the discrimination lawsuit, the Secret Service was ordered to turn over evidence. The agency paid an outside auditor more than \$2 million to search 20 million emails and other electronic documents dating back 16 years.

Among the 10 emails sub-

mitted to the court earlier this month in a separate filing were jokes circulated within the agency that referred to the way a "20-year-old 5th grader" in Harlem spoke; assassination of Rev. Jesse Jackson; and the work ethic of a Black golf caddy.

One of the emails was sent by a deputy assistant director, who has since been suspended.

In addition, one of the supervisors who sent an email was on Sen. Barack Obama's security detail for the past year. The supervisor is no longer on the security detail and has been promoted to a position at the agency's Washington headquarters.

The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court in Washington in 2000. Lawyers say the Secret Service

has delayed turning over evidence in the case. They are scheduled to argue that issue in court Thursday.

New voters are generally less reliable. So there's no guarantee this year's newcomers will stick around in years to come — or even cast ballots in November if their candidate doesn't make it.

"I will be very disappointed, and it will take me some time to recover," Ector said of an Obama loss to Hillary Rodham Clinton. "I'm not going to say I'm just going to write off politics for good, but it does make you feel like you're doing all this work for nothing, and nothing's coming to fruition."

Even if some discouraged new voters drop off, the numbers are striking.

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In 2007, 80 percent of the people who worked at the Secret Service were White, and 10 percent were Black, according to data obtained by The Associated Press. The remaining 10 percent were of other races. In the agency's senior leadership, Whites made up about 75 percent and Blacks 13 percent. Blacks make up about 12 percent of the United States' population.

The Secret Service investigates counterfeiting cases and protects presidents, vice presidents, their family members and other dignitaries. The agency, previously part of the Treasury Department, became part of the Homeland Security Department in 2002.

Inmates

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hours early.

"The need is huge. The turnout exceeded our expectation. We brought test kits for a thousand applicants. Close to 2,000 people showed up..." said organizer Kim Carter, founder of the Time for Change Foundation. She scoffed at media claims that the job fair 'stumbled' when it ran out of test kits.

"We tested and processed 1,200 applicants — of the thousands who looked for work today, 64 people found jobs. I call that success." She pointed to supporters who donated supplies, food, transportation and portable toilets and the dozens of volunteers, many of them ex-offenders, who staffed testing sites, provided child care and manned

registration tables. "We're not just talking the talk, we're walking the walk one ex-inmate, one job at a time," said Carter.

She said organizers using city and county databases mailed 60,000 letters to potential employers hoping they would step to the line and hire an ex-inmate. "We're disappointed that only nine employers set up booths, but we're not giving up."

Bloomington Recycling came to the job fair looking to hire forklift operators, drivers and other laborers. Human resources representative Griselda Gonzalez stressed the importance of giving ex-inmates a second chance. "This is a population of untapped resources. We feel if we offer ex-offenders

a good opportunity, it makes for a safer and healthier community, and that makes us feel good, too. If you don't have a job, you don't have much of a prayer of staying clean," said Gonzalez.

"I'm feeling very blessed," said Helen Johnson who landed a job as a braider for Clippers Family Cuts. "Now I can get my life back on track."

Tippy Gaines, a mother who earned her bachelor's degree in business while serving time for drug possession said big companies who use prison labor often restrict the recruitment of ex-offenders once they are released.

"AT&T, Victoria Secret, McDonalds, Revlon, Honda, Honeywell, Nordstrom's and Toys 'R' Us use prison slave labor to beef up their profits,

but when these same people get out looking for a job paying real wages, they refuse to hire them," said Gaines.

In fact, a 2005 U.S. Department of Labor survey of 160 U.S. business leaders found that only 21 percent would actively consider taking on ex-offenders as trainees, and only 7 percent would consider having a policy of recruiting ex-offenders as permanent staff.

Glass, forced to take minimum wage jobs since his release in 2006, sees a disconnect between ex-prisoners, employers and the local governments that willingly spend large chunks of their budgets on apprehending and incarcerating repeat offenders.

"On one hand, many of these business leaders and

cash-strapped cities complain about recidivism, all the while, spending millions to keep people behind bars and pennies to create jobs. We want to work. We don't want to go back to prison," he said.

Volunteers announcing the event shut down offered hot dogs, chips and water. People like Sharon Whitfield pressed on handing out summaries of a recent Pew Foundation report showing more than one in every 100 adults in America is in jail or prison with California, Texas and Florida topping the list.

"We are the world's jailer," Whitfield shouted. "When we leave these prisons, we've got to eat. We've got to feed our families. We want jobs." The crowd broke into a loud chant "Jobs... Not Jail." Carter meanwhile

mingled among the job seekers offering words of wisdom to keep the faith because she was once a parolee.

"People will say you can't overcome. I say you can. It doesn't matter what you're going through, remember, it is just that, going through. If someone who has made a bad choice in their life and now has an EX on their back, it's just the beginning of a long journey back," Carter told applicants waiting to meet with prospective employers.

"You're sending a powerful message today: 'Ex-offenders are not just sitting around committing crimes like they say you are. You want to work.'" The crowd cheered and dispersed with a promise that this job fair was just the beginning.

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