No West concession; partial recount ordered

By MATT SEDENSKY
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Firebrand GOP Rep. Allen West, whose made-for-TV rhetoric made him a prized voice of extreme conservatives, has been ousted by political newcomer Patrick Murphy, according to the state's vote count Saturday, but the incumbent was not planning to concede.

Though above the threshold for a full recount, St. Lucie County agreed late Saturday to recount early votes on Sunday. Barring a sizeable shift, the complete but unofficial numbers showed Murphy with 50.4 percent of the vote and held a 2,442-vote lead in the District 18 race. Still, West's campaign said they would press forward.

"We're simply not going to just walk away from the race until we see that the numbers add up," West campaign manager Tim Edson said.

Murphy declared victory early Wednesday morning and has held his lead ever since, even as thousands of absentee and provisional ballots were processed. He issued a statement Saturday saying "it is now time to put the campaign behind us" and has repeatedly said his win is a signal that voters are tired of the extremism exemplified by West.

"I look at it as a movement of moderation in our country," he said. "I think this is a signal to the public and to, really, Congress that we need people who are willing to compromise, willing to come together."

West's campaign insists there are many unanswered questions in the race, mostly centered in St. Lucie County, the only one of three counties in the district that Murphy won. They've expressed concern votes were counted twice and have asked to review sign-in books from the polls to ensure the number of voters matches the ballot count.

Jeffrey Scott Shapiro, an attorney with West's campaign, said the St. Lucie recount would determine the Republican's direction going forward.

"It doesn't satisfy every concern but it may become a moot point depending on what the results are," he said.

Under state law, West still could contest the election if they believe misconduct or fraud might have changed its result. Edson suggested if the campaign is able to review ballots to its satisfaction, that might be avoided.
"If all the votes have been counted and we see that those numbers do add up," Edson said, "then obviously the congressman will concede at that time."

In an interview Friday with television station WPEC, West said "being a member of Congress does not define who I am" and that he was not conceding because he believed the voters deserved such action.

"If I come out on the short end of the stick, guess what?" he said. "I salute the flag, I wish you good luck and I continue on, and hopefully my replacement will be able to go up and contend with these monumental issues."

The race was the country's most expensive, and one of its most closely watched House contests.

West, a former Army lieutenant colonel, has a passionate legion of supporters and an equally passionate opposition. He has elevated his profile with a seemingly unending string of headline-grabbing statements, from calling scores of congressional Democrats communists to labeling Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz as "vile" and "despicable." He said President Barack Obama, Rep. Nancy Pelosi and others should "get the hell out of the United States."

West, 51, moved north to District 18 after redistricting made his old seat an unlikely win. Murphy, 29, followed him and has sought to portray the congressman as an extremist who has done little else in Washington than stoke partisan fires with his trademark controversy.

West had out-funded Murphy more than four-to-one, flooding the district in advertising and seeking to paint the Democrat as an empty-suited rich kid. The two sides had raised nearly $21 million as of Oct. 17, according to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, and Super PACS supporting the candidates poured in about $6.6 million.

The campaign's most attention-getting ad featured Murphy's mugshot from a teenage arrest, seeking to undermine his trustworthiness and portray him as unfit for leadership.

"The most difficult thing for West to do in this election was to campaign negatively against somebody who really has no record at all," said Kevin Wagner, a political science professor at Florida Atlantic University. "It's hard to hang too much on Murphy, so you end up reaching back to a barfight when he's 19."