

ST. HELENA



School in ashes

A fire Monday at St. Helena Central High School destroyed the main building which housed 12 classrooms, and other administration offices, about \$2 million in damages.
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ELECTIONS

Long lines expected into night

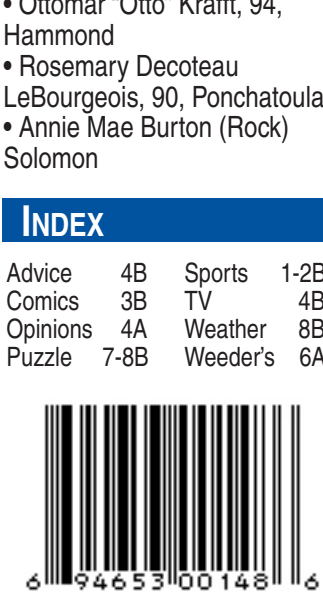
BATON ROUGE (AP) — Lengthy waits and a late night of vote tallying is expected today as Louisianians cast their votes in the presidential and congressional races. Secretary of State Jay Dardenne expects a voter turnout topping 70 percent statewide, after a record early voting period that saw 9 percent of voters casting ballots ahead of the election. Candidates spent Monday campaigning with their core voters, making sure they turn out to vote if they haven't done so already. Besides the presidential race, the top of the ticket belongs to Louisiana's U.S. Senate race. Democratic incumbent Mary Landrieu is seeking a third term, challenged by Republican state Treasurer John Kennedy. Meanwhile, voters in New Orleans are deciding whether U.S. Rep. William Jefferson should get a shot to keep his seat despite the cloud of a federal indictment looming over him, and District 1 voters on the Northshore are choosing between U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise and Jim Harlan.

OBITUARIES

- Mary Anderson, 54
- Ottomar "Otto" Krafft, 94, Hammond
- Rosemary Decoteau LeBourgeois, 90, Ponchatoula
- Annie Mae Burton (Rock) Solomon

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Local early votes may reach 7,500

By **JOAN DAVIS**
Daily Star City Editor

Polls will open at 6 a.m. and close at 8 p.m. for the presidential election today, but nearly 7,500 Tangipahoa Parish voters have already cast their ballots. Early voting ballots numbered 7,393 as of Monday morning. With the deadline for military personnel and overseas residents tonight, the registrar

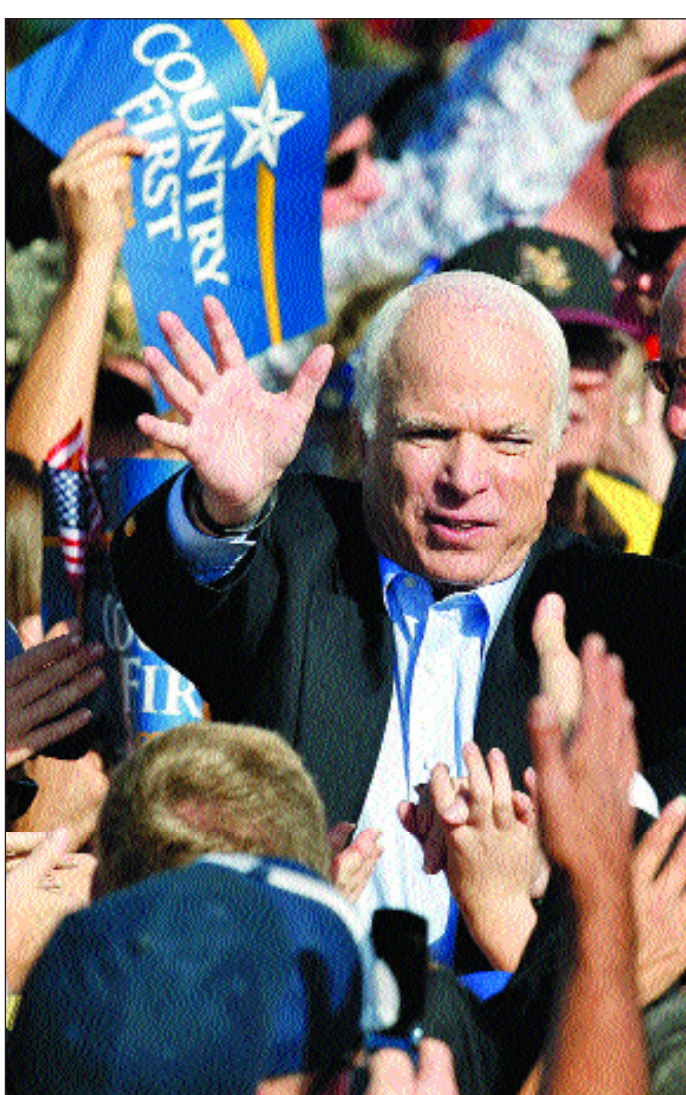
of voters expects the number to be closer to 7,500, which is 11 percent. The deadline to receive those ballots is 8 p.m. Any ballots that come in at 8:01 p.m. will be too late, John Russell said. The absentee commissioners — four teams of two and one person to run the scanner — will begin the tabulation of early voting/absentee by mail at 1 p.m. today, Russell said. Those commissioners will

be sequestered from any public contact, he said. Russell hopes the process of tabulating the early ballots won't take more than seven hours. He is aiming to deliver the results of early voting to the clerk of court by the time the polls close. "The sheer numbers we're dealing with are almost twice as many as we've ever had," he said. Of the total number of early

voting ballots, 6,900 were in person, he said. Mailed-in ballots are scanned, and faxed ballots are manually counted by the commissioners, he said. If the voter did not make a large enough check on a mail-in ballot, the scanner will beep, indicating the need for a hand count. At 8 p.m., the election is officially complete, but voters standing in line at a polling place at 8 p.m. will be allowed

to vote, according to state law. "You can't drive up at 8:01," he said. Russell predicted results probably will not be made public before 8:30 or 9 p.m. "My concern as a professional election administrator is that people have a favorable experience," he said. "This is a historical election, and people want to make sure they're part of it." Call the registrar of voters

ELECTION DAY



Chris O'Meara/AP Photo



Alex Brandon/AP Photo

DOWN TO THE WIRE — Above, left, Republican presidential candidate, John McCain, R-Ariz. reaches into the crowd to greet supporters after a campaign speech in Tampa, Fla., Monday; while at right, Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., waves as he enters a rally at the University of Cincinnati in Cincinnati, Ohio Sunday.

Rivals reach for finish line

By **BETH FOUHY AND DAVID EXPO**
Associated Press Writers

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Barack Obama radiated confidence and John McCain displayed the grit of an underdog Monday as the presidential rivals reached for the finish line of a two-year marathon with a burst of campaigning across battlegrounds from the Atlantic Coast to Arizona. "We are one day away from change in America," said Obama, a Democrat seeking to become the first black president — a dream not nearly as distant on election eve as it once was. McCain, too, promised to turn the page of the era of George W. Bush, and he warned about his opponent's intentions. "Sen. Obama is in the far left lane" of politics, he said. "He's more liberal than a guy who calls himself a Socialist and that's not easy." Republican running mate Sarah Palin was even more pointed as she campaigned in Ohio. "Now is not the time to experiment with socialism," she said. "Our opponent's plan is just for bigger government."

Voter Complaints

Complaints of election irregularities, including voter fraud and abuse, vote buying and threats to disrupt or inhibit the election process can be reported to the Elections Compliance Unit at (800) 722-5305 or (225) 342-4479.

Late-season attacks aside, Obama led in virtually all the pre-election polls in a race where economic concerns dominated and the war in Iraq was pushed — however temporarily — into the background. By their near-non-stop attention to states that voted Republican in 2004, both men acknowledged the Democrats' advantage. The two rivals both began their days in Florida, a traditionally Republican state with 27 electoral votes where polls make it close. Obama drew 9,000 or so at a rally in Jacksonville, while across the state, a crowd estimated at roughly 1,000 turned out for McCain. One day before the election, no battleground state was left unattended. But Virginia, where no Democrat has won in 40 years, and Ohio, where no Republican president has ever lost, seemed most coveted. Together, they account for 33

electoral votes that McCain can scarcely do without. Democratic volunteers in Maryland, a state safe for Obama, called voters in next-door Virginia, where McCain trailed in the polls. The Democratic presidential candidate's visit to Virginia during the day was his 11th since he clinched the nomination. Unwilling to concede anything, McCain's campaign filed a lawsuit in Richmond seeking to force election officials to count late-arriving ballots from members of the armed forces overseas. No hearing was immediately scheduled. Several hundred miles away in Ohio — the state that sealed Bush's second term in 2004 — voters waited as long as three hours in line to cast ballots in Columbus, part of heavily contested Franklin County. Poll workers handed out bottles of water to sustain them.

Lori Huffman, 38, a supervisor at UPS Inc., took the day off to vote early for her man, McCain. "It's exciting isn't it?" she asked, gesturing toward the long line of waiting voters. "This is happening all over the state, from Cleveland to Dayton," said Gov. Ted Strickland, a Democrat trying to deliver his state to Obama. Obama hoped so, after more than a year building an elaborate get-out-the-vote operation, first for the primary campaign, now for the general election. The Democrat flew from Florida to North Carolina to Virginia, all states that went Republican in 2004, before heading home to Chicago on Election Eve. Twenty-one months after he launched his campaign, he allowed, "You know. I feel pretty peaceful ... I gotta say." On a syndicated radio program, the Russ Parr Morning Show, he said, "The question is going to be who wants it more," he added. "And I hope that our supporters want it bad, because I think the country needs it." If wanting it were all that mattered, the race would be a *See RIVALRY, 2A*

Video bingo

Vote will decide fate of parlors

By **BRENNAN DAVID**
Daily Star Staff Writer

The state's first ever citizen-driven referendum to be placed on a ballot will be decided today by Hammond residents. A ban of electronic video bingo machines within city limits will be decided, ending a nine-month initiative by the Citizens for a Better Community coalition. The grassroots organization began its initiative in February with the request of a petition, and is today hours away from reaching its sought-after goal. "I think we have done what we could do," said organizer Jeanne Voorhees. "We have tried to make a couple of points with our small advertising budget. This has been a beautiful exercise in grassroots democracy. We have done all we can." One of the CBC's arguments against video bingo is that the machines and its functions are similar to video poker. In November 1996, the state legislature decided to leave it up to the people whether to allow video poker or not. Parish residents declined video poker with 53 percent (16,942) of the vote, but today's turnout is expected to be record breaking. Over past weeks, Voorhees said the CBC does not have the manpower to go door to door like its opponent and understood from the beginning electronic video bingo supporters would outspend the small coalition. She also worries some voters think by voting against the ban they will be saving traditional bingo sessions held in city limits that either they or family members currently attend. The referendum, however, is strictly a ban against electronic video bingo, she said, not all bingo. Nick Gagliano, a spokesperson representing local charities receive funding from electronic video bingo, said the group is glad for the election and thinks voters should have the right to decide. "I think we got our message out," Gagliano said. "Our message has always been about the \$2 million local charities receive each year from video bingo." Unlike the CBC, local charities have been out canvassing neighborhoods for weeks. Their efforts have resulted in pro-electronic video bingo campaign signs across Hammond as well as even television commercials. If the referendum is approved, the fate of three video bingo parlors in Hammond could be decided, including 17 local charities: **Cypress Bingo Palace** Beta Pi of Theta Xi Inc. Communication Expo Hammond Knights Hammond Union of Police 345 Richard Murphy Hospice Theta Kappa Epsilon Fraternity **Hammond Bingo Palace** Grambling College Alumni Association



It's All About Our Children



Today is Election Day
Please Vote

BLAIR DOWNING #71
Edwards
JUVENILE COURT JUDGE
DIVISION I
It's All About Our Children.