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Electoral College casts its votes today

BY ANNA M. TINSLEY

THE FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

FORT WORTH, Texas -- Kaye Moreno of Fort Worth heads to Austin today for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

She will be one of the 538 Electoral College voters nationwide to travel to their state capitols and cast the final votes - the ones that truly matter - in the 2012 presidential election.

Moreno knows she and the rest of the Texas delegation will be in the minority, giving theirs votes to the Republican presidential slate of Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan.

But she also knows that she will participate in a historic moment experienced by few others.

"I was hoping that I would be able to go in and cast my vote for an incoming president," said Moreno, 57. "But it is quite a honor to do this."

She and 37 other Texans - one from each congressional district and two selected statewide - will gather in the state House chamber at 2 p.m. today to formally give their electoral votes to Romney, who handily claimed a majority in this state.

After the votes have been cast in Texas and all the other states, all the ballots will be sent to Vice President Joe Biden, who will read them to both houses of Congress on Jan. 6, unless Congress changes the date.

Today will be a bittersweet day not just for Moreno, but for many others, including Kenneth Williams of Fort Worth.

Williams supported Obama and was chosen to be a Democratic Electoral College voter, but he won't cast a ballot because Texas went to Romney.

"I'm still going to the ceremony," said Williams, 57, a mechanic who works for the U.S. Postal Service. "I want to experience what the Electoral College is about and I want to see how the process works.

"We were hoping to carry Texas for Obama, but since we weren't able to do that, the least I can do ... is show up, take notes and look forward to trying to serve again."

'The people'

Jean McIver of Frisco will join Moreno in casting an Electoral College vote - for the first time - for Romney.

"It would have been really exciting if the election results had been different," said McIver, who represents much of Tarrant and Denton counties on the state Republican Executive Committee. "But we will participate anyway."

The Electoral College dates to the 1800s as the name given to a group of citizens chosen by "the people" to formally cast the final vote for president and vice president.

The founding fathers created the Electoral College and put it in the Constitution as a way to create a middle ground between letting Congress and qualified voters nationwide elect the president. They also wanted to give every state a proportionate voice in the process.

So they created the college and decided that a simple majority would determine the country's president every four years. Electors now total 538, and a majority is 270 or more.

In each state, two sets of voters are chosen and poised to cast their ballots, depending on which candidate wins their state's vote.

On Election Day, the Obama-Biden ticket carried 27 states, picking up 332 electoral votes. The Romney-Ryan ticket won 24 states, earning 206 votes.

Since Romney won Texas, the 38 Republican electors will vote today. If Obama had won the state, 38 Democrats would have traveled to Austin for the vote.

"I am a little bit disappointed," Williams said. "But I understand the system and how it goes with the Electoral College.

"I don't know how many other fellow Democrats like myself will go," he said. "I hope I'm not the lone wolf."

Antiquated system?

Federal law states that Electoral College voters meet on the Monday after the second Wednesday of December.

Once Biden reads the results to Congress, Obama's win is official and final. And he will move forward to his second inauguration, on Jan. 21.

The Electoral College process last fell under the microscope in 2000, when George W. Bush won the Electoral College, 271-266 (one voter abstained) even though Gore won the nation's popular vote.

Critics have long said the Electoral College is an antiquated system that disenfranchises voters nationwide. Gore and others have called for letting the popular vote determine the presidency.

"It's a terrible process," said George C. Edwards III, a political science professor at Oxford and at Texas A&M University in College Station. "The whole system is horrible and it violates basic norms.

"It's crazy and it's a terrible system," said Edwards, who has written the book *Why the Electoral College is Bad for America*. "It means there's no election in most of the country. ... The Electoral College forces candidates only to campaign in competitive states ... so places like Texas are ignored."

But R.E. "Royal" Smith is pleased to cast his vote today for Romney through the process.

"The Electoral College is a part of our overall political system and it's something we should cherish and maintain because our founding fathers planned it this way," said Smith, a World War II veteran and retired psychologist from Southlake. "I just feel like we need to hang on to the institutions that have created this great country.

"I feel like it's an honor to be an elector."

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