

CALGARY VOTES

NENSHI NABS IT

Election day marred by long lines, ballot shortages & slow-to-come results

JAMES WOOD

After a tumultuous municipal campaign and a chaotic election day on Monday, Naheed Nenshi was returned to office for a third term as Calgary's mayor.

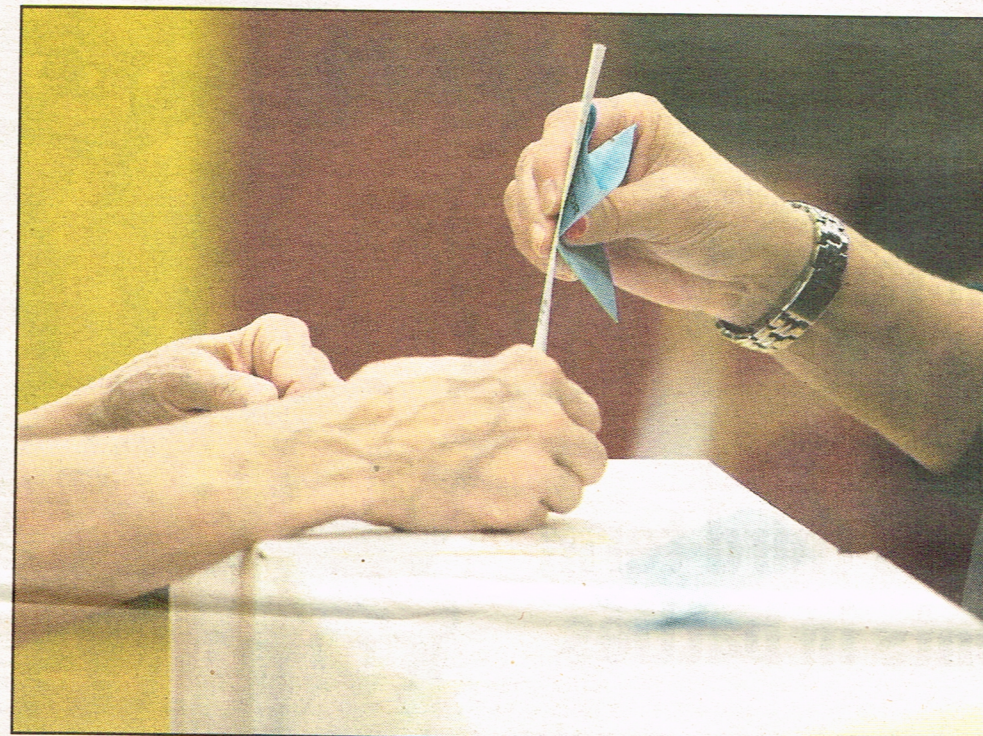
While the city website was agonizingly slow in posting results due to unknown technical difficulties, Bill Smith — a Calgary lawyer and former president of the provincial Progressive Conservative party — conceded defeat late Monday after his numbers trailed Nenshi's all night.

Nenshi, a history-maker in 2010 as North America's first Muslim big city mayor who was easily reelected in 2013, was once expected to coast to victory in this election, but instead faced the danger of losing his job as Calgary struggles through a lingering downturn spurred by stagnant oil prices.

University of Calgary political scientist Jack Lucas said that if Nenshi ultimately prevailed on Monday night, it was due to the connection he had forged with many Calgary residents.

"There were quite a large number of voters in Calgary who were pretty determined to vote for a candidate who was not Nenshi," said Lucas.

"But Naheed Nenshi still has a strong base of support in this city and clearly people from a wide range of ideological and partisan perspec-



JIM WELLS/POSTMEDIA

Calgarians cast their ballot in the 2017 Civic Election at Briar Hill Elementary School.

tives are still willing to vote for him."

High turnout in the campaign resulted in long lineups at the polls and some voting stations running out of ballots on Monday.

Polls officially closed at 8 p.m., though those who were already in line at the time were still able to cast their ballots.

With some frustrated voters choosing to leave rather than wait, the chaos at the polling stations had caused some

consternation among the campaigns.

Rick Donkers, spokesman for Nenshi's main challenger, Bill Smith, said the campaign of Smith — a Calgary lawyer and former president of the provincial Progressive Conservative party — was feeling optimistic as polls closed.

But the crowd at Nenshi's headquarters was increasingly upbeat as results continued to show the incumbent ahead of Smith in the close race. Nenshi's campaign said they were encouraged by the results as they trickled in, while volunteers were said they believed he was headed for a win.

"People that support Mayor Nenshi are people who are not looking at the next four years, but are looking at 15 or 20 years down the line," said Gena Rotstein, a Nenshi fundraiser.

But it was a tougher fight for Nenshi than many had expected a few months ago.

“

It felt a bit like being in a banana republic.”

Steve Major, of huge delays at a Calgary polling station

Out of a field of nine challengers, Smith became the main threat to Nenshi and a strong contender to become Calgary's 37th mayor.

Smith's campaign was light on policy but he has taken aim at Nenshi over a rising property tax burden and what he described as the mayor's high-handed attitude, which his supporters contrasted with Smith's avuncular image.

Mount Royal University political scientist Lori Williams said issues of dollars and cents have dominated the campaign, though questions of personality have also been key.

"It's about money, about the economy, about the wise expenditure of taxpayers' dollars and whether the current council has done a good job on that and whether the dynamics on city council are something people want to continue," says Williams.