

Kaohsiung voters recall Han Kuo-yu

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Supporters of a campaign to recall Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu cheer outside the campaign headquarters after the recall vote passed in Kaohsiung yesterday.

Photo: CNA

Kaohsiung residents in a recall vote yesterday overwhelmingly voted to remove Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) from office.

The result made Han the nation's first special municipality head to be recalled, just a year-and-a-half after he won a surprise victory over a candidate from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which had run the city for two decades.

The vote was 939,090 in favor of recall and 25,051 against, with a 42.14 percent voter turnout, Kaohsiung City Election Commission data showed.

There are 2,299,981 eligible voters in the city, the data showed.

At least 25 percent of eligible voters — or 574,996 people — had to vote in favor of a recall and the number of people voting for it must exceed the number of those voting against for the recall motion to pass, according to Article 90 of the Civil Servants Election and Recall Act (公職人員選舉罷免法).

The 939,090 votes in favor of the recall was more than Han had garnered in November 2018's mayoral election, when he won the four-candidate race with 892,545 votes, or 53.86 percent, in a traditional DPP stronghold.

The recall petition against Han began in June last year, after Han announced a presidential bid less than six months into his mayoral term.

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The civic organizations that initiated the petition said that Han launching a presidential bid so soon after being elected mayor angered many Kaohsiung residents, who thought he was not prioritizing the city's governance.

The recall campaign had strong backing from DPP politicians.

After the vote results yesterday, Han led city government officials in a news conference and took a bow thanking Kaohsiung residents for electing him in 2018.

He also expressed his gratitude to city government officials who worked with him.

However, he said he was sorry to see the DPP focusing all its attention on "endless slander" against him since the party won the presidential election in January.

The mudslinging has hurt the city government, as the hard work of its officials has been reduced to nothing, Han said.

Noting that agricultural produce exports have increased and the city government's disease prevention efforts topped the nation, he said it is regrettable he could no longer lead his administrative team to serve the city and keep his promises to build new roads, attract investments and take care of disadvantaged people.

"I hope future mayors will lead Kaohsiung toward prosperity, and I hope Kaohsiung will become a great, bright and wealthy city," he said.

Some Han supporters broke into tears upon learning that the recall vote had passed. Some called on him to run for KMT chairman and again for Kaohsiung mayor in 2024, while others said Han's recall was the city's loss.

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Supporters of the Wecare Kaohsiung coalition, which organized the recall campaign, were ecstatic, chanting: “I [am a] Kaohsiung [resident], I [am] proud.”

Lead petition organizer Chen Kuan-jung (陳冠雄) called on Kaohsiung residents to put aside their differences and help heal the rift that has plagued the city since 2018.

“New life has come, the people of Kaohsiung, clap for yourselves,” Wecare spokesperson Lee Yi-chieh (李宜傑) said.

The time of conflict, hate and lies has come to an end, and the residents of Kaohsiung should, together, embark on a journey toward true freedom, Lee added.

“We have succeeded and we are aware of the imperfections of the law, but that is what we can work toward, to make the power of the people greater,” Lee said.

Taiwan Statebuilding Party member Chang Po-yang (張博洋) said that the people of Kaohsiung can only rejoice for one night, because tomorrow they have to start working to mend the schism between city residents.

Chang also called on recall supporters not to blame those who disagreed with the movement, as they have different ideas, but love Kaohsiung nonetheless.

Additional reporting by Huang Hsu-lei and Fang Chih-hsien

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