Peres wins first round of Israel vote

by UPI

JERUSALEM - Israeli Vice Premier Shimon Peres was the victor Wednesday in the country's first Knesset vote for a new president.

Peres won the first round of voting. He was three votes fewer than the 61 required for victory but far ahead of Likud challenger Reuven Rivlin, who received 37 votes, and Labor Party lawmaker Collette Avital, who got 21, Haaretz reported.

In the second round, he received 86 votes in favor and there were 23 against, the Jerusalem Post reported.

In his victory note, Peres thanked his opponents and struck an optimistic note.

"I have been in the Knesset for 48 years and not for one moment have I lost faith or hope in Israel," said Peres. "What Israel has achieved in 60 years, no other country has been able to achieve."

Meanwhile, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak defeated Member of Knesset Ami Ayalon in a tight race for Labor Party leadership, the Jerusalem Post reported. A 65 percent voter turnout helped propel Barak to 51.3 percent against Ayalon's 47.7 percent, Haaretz said.

Barak's appointment brings an end to the 19-month tenure of Amir Peretz as head of the party.

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