

Haiti lawmakers elect Senate chief as provisional president

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In the early hours of yesterday, Jocelerme Privert was elected as provisional president and sworn in after a lengthy session by Haiti's bicameral legislature. He was one of three candidates vying to lead an interim government that's only supposed to last 120 days.

His new position will be that of a powerbroker who hopefully carries enough weight to smooth political divisions that have left Haiti without an elected president or a completed Parliament. Prime Minister Evans Paul remains in office for now, but Privert and lawmakers are expected to confirm a number two official in coming days.

During a speech to lawmakers hours before the final vote, Privert vowed to lead a caretaker administration that would "foster confidence within all sectors of society," ensure stability and see that suspended elections are held "as soon as possible."

He became president after 3 a.m. EDT (0800 GMT) following a second round of voting that put him over the top with 13 votes from senators and 64 votes from lower house deputies. There was a lengthy period of closed-door negotiations after an initial round gave Privert just two votes more than candidate Edgard Leblanc, a former Senate president who was being backed by Martelly's political faction.

Martelly, who was barred by Haiti's constitution from seeking a consecutive term as president, departed office a week ago without a new elected leader in place.

A runoff presidential election was delayed for a second time last month amid violent opposition protests and deep public suspicions about vote rigging in favour of his chosen successor.