

The election eye...

Good turnout bolsters May primary election

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Despite the woeful lack of interesting races, Tuesday's primary election attracted a surprisingly large vote.

Predictions indicate the turnout would be extremely light because of this and in contrast with a number of interest primary contests two years ago.

An analysis showed voters are attracted to presidential races, even though the one of last week was hardly a contest. At least it gave the citizens a chance to vote for the nomination, something they haven't been able to do for so many years.

Reagan and Carter hardly had any contest after Bush dropped out the preceding day and Senator Kennedy continued to lose in other states.

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Gertrude Brandstetter, audit clerk at the secretary of state office, was even surprised herself when she started checking figures from the election. She found that 184,188 had voted, or 37.6 percent of the 490,000 registered, well above the 30 percent predicted by her boss, Secretary of State Pete T. Cenarrusa.

Even more startling is the fact this is above the 177,082 who voted in the 1978 primary, which was 35.5 percent of the 498,425 registered.

Bonneville County, where there were only two Republican contests on the local level, did even better. There were 12,545 who marched to the polls, or 40 percent of the 31,269 registered.

Ellen Bingham, county election clerk, and this writer both; predicted a 40 percent turnout and that's exactly what it was despite the dire forecast by many it would be an unusually light vote.

The Bonneville balloting was below 1978 when an all-time record of 13,369 voted, 44 percent of the 30,446 registered. However, this was due to a religious controversy which developed in the closing days of the campaign.

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Political followers recalled that one of the candidates, C.L. "Butch" Otter charged another rival, Allan F. Larsen, Blackfoot, was using the Mormon facilities and people in his campaign. This rightfully aroused the Mormons so they came out in large numbers and gave Larsen a narrow primary victory over the pre-election favorite, Vernon F. Ravnscroft. Otter finished third.

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Many legislators are unhappy about a primary in May and were hopeful the light turnout would give them a reason for changing the date back to early August, or perhaps even September. Yet, no matter what date is selected there are advantages and disadvantages, and one must be balanced against the other.

Lawmakers complain they don't have enough time to campaign after Legislature adjournment in late March. County clerks and statewide candidates protest the September date on

grounds it doesn't give them enough time to prepare for the November general election.

The protests of the county clerks can be discounted because the election is geared for the people, not for convenience of the county clerks.

The statewide candidates do have a strong point, however. Idaho is a large state, one of the largest geographically in the nation, and candidates for state offices find it difficult to cover it in less than two months. Yet, they could make their organization plans ahead of the primary but the candidates say this is frequently impossible because in a contest they don't know who will be the nominee until the election returns are in.

In all fairness the present system should continue for another election, although it is almost certain there will be efforts to junk it. But any argument that the primary vote was light is scotched by the turnout which was heavier than in past primaries.