

JUN 5 1988



Ben Plastino

Primary election gives hints

Primary election results usually give hints on how candidates will do in the November general elections. The election May 24 was no exception, despite the record low turnout.

It appears that only those with a strong interest in government or devout party loyalty cast ballots, while the bulk of voters, largely the independents with no strong political convictions, sat on their hands.

In Idaho, only about 119,000 people voted, an all-time low of 22.9 percent of the state's 517,000 registered voters. This was far below the 34.2 percent turnout in 1986, 34.1 percent in 1984, 29.4 percent in 1982. The record high is 41.3 percent in the 1980 election, followed by 35.5 percent in 1978.

In Bonneville, it was even worse in this year's primary. Only 4,327 people cast ballots, 12.6 percent of the 34,302 registered, with the Republicans holding a 3-1 edge. This compares with 39 percent two years earlier.

"I'm disappointed," said Ellen Bingham, Bonneville County election clerk. "It costs the county the same to hold an election, no matter how few vote."

The lack of contests is being blamed for the low turnout in most of the state.

There was good voter participation in counties where primary contests were offered, such as in Bingham, Madison, Lemhi, Jefferson and Fremont.

Pre-election predictions on winners in the primary in the 2nd Congressional District and Legislative District 30 state representative races were accurate, but the margins were smaller than anticipated.

The forecast indicated former eight-term state Sen. Dane Watkins would win decisively, probably by close to 3-1, over a neophyte, Janet L. Reid. Watkins polled 20,547 to Reid's 14,400, only 59-41 percent.

In District 30, made up of Jefferson, Lemhi, Clark, Custer and Butte counties, the eight-term state representative, Ray Infanger, Salmon, vanquished Billy McMurtrey, Arco, 3,343 to 2,226. That was 60-40 percent, slightly less of a margin than anticipated.

It's obvious that Watkins' comparatively weak showing against token opposition shows he faces a fearsome task to win in November. The incumbent, Democrat Richard Stallings, topped his ticket in most counties, indicating he is widening his base of support. Despite all the expected fiery campaign rhetoric ahead, and except for some dramatic unforeseen development, Stallings should win by close to 60 percent.

There were three Bonneville contests that were scarcely noticed. They were for Republican precinct committeemen, which is hardly of major importance. In Precinct 2, Eagle Rock district, Kurt A. Karst nosed out Paul H. Flager, 19-17; in Precinct 40, University Place, Dennis Love beat Edith M. Ward 25-20; and in Precinct 50, Sumner, Scott R.

Hall led with 28 to nose out Robert L. Webster, 26, and Farris T. Call, 22. The Democrats elected only eight precinct committeemen without opposition and the Republicans named 34 in the 57 precincts.

The 2nd District congressional contests, three legislative races and the Bonneville County sheriff fracas appear to be the features in eastern Idaho for the November election. There also are a number of county commissioner and sheriff contests in other counties which carry high local interest.

In Bonneville, Sheriff Richard Ackerman, the only county Democrat to hold an elective office, and Republican Marvin Campbell, former Idaho Falls police officer, could lock up in a tight contest in the general. Each ran well in his respective primary. Ackerman, considered by veteran political observers as one of the outstanding sheriffs in Bonneville County's history, holds the decided edge of incumbency. Campbell, a brother of Idaho Falls Mayor Tom Campbell, carries the Republican label in his favor.

Two brisk legislative races loom in District 26, Bingham County. Republican State Sen. Jerry Twiggs, faces a stiff race from Democrat Israel Merrill, Springfield grocer, a former 20-year legislator. Merrill ran far ahead of the Democratic ticket in the primary, while Twiggs drew a normal Republican vote. That might indicate Merrill holds the edge. For state representative, Republican State Rep. Michael K. Simpson,

Blackfoot dentist, surprisingly ran behind his ticket in the primary and can expect a tough challenge from Democrat Jeff Colson, Blackfoot, who drew a normal vote.

Bingham, it must be remembered, was the strongest Democratic Idaho county a dozen years ago or more and gave Stallings a decisive vote margin in 1986.

In the other legislative contests, two newcomers, Republican Rex L. Furness and Democrat Raymond S. Lindstrom, both of Rigby, are paired in an election to replace Republican state Sen. Vearl Crystal, Lewisville, who chose not to run again. In heavy Republican District 30, Fullmer must be given the decided edge. Both drew normal votes in their respective primary.

In Bonneville, the primary shows Sens. Ann Rydalch, Michael Crapo and John Hansen and the state representative candidates, including newcomer Mel Richardson, and incumbents Stan Hawkins, John O. Sessions and Reed Hansen, ran at the head of their ticket. Drawing fewer votes were state Sen. Lee Staker and Reps. Con Mahoney, Ralph Steele and Tom Loertcher. That indicates they could be the most vulnerable for defeat, if they should be opposed in the future.

(Ben Plastino is a Post-Register columnist.)