

Low caucus turnout has Nevada GOP contemplating primary

By Ray Hagar, Reno Gazette-Journal

The dismal turnout for the Nevada Republican caucus had some GOP leaders and lawmakers on Sunday considering replacing the system with a presidential primary election. The idea was discussed by Washoe County GOP officials Saturday night after just 6,700 Republicans attended the county caucuses, although the party was expecting about 17,000.

Caucus participation was down across Nevada. Although final numbers have not yet been released by the Nevada GOP, the projections are that the final turnout would be about 34,000, or 10,000 below the 2008 caucus mark of 44,000. GOP officials had predicted a turnout that could hit 60,000.

"We were talking about this last night," said Dave Buell, chairman of the Washoe GOP. "We think the real issue is that Republicans hate the caucus system.

"And I'll tell you, the people that did come to the caucus, overwhelmingly want a primary in this state and not a caucus," Buell said.

Buell is not alone in his desire for a primary, a leading political consultant said.

"I think it is an idea whose time has come, especially with the way the count has gone today," said Reno political consultant Greg Ferraro, referring to the troubles the Nevada GOP has endured in counting caucus ballots. "I think there is growing support among Republicans, even Republican leaders, that maybe a primary, even though it does cost some money, may be the way to go."

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