

Alpine County high voter turnout in June defies state trend

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

California's election turnout last month set a record low for a presidential primary in the state, with more than two of every three registered voters opting not to cast ballots.

Oddly, in light of the dismal turnout, more Californians than ever before voted by mail – with 65 percent of ballots cast coming via the Postal Service, the secretary of state's office said Friday.

The previous high for vote-by-mail was 62 percent, set in May 2009.

"Given the ease and convenience that voting by mail offers, it's not surprising to see more and more people choose to cast their ballots from home," Secretary of State Debra Bowen said in a written statement.

Bowen gave no explanation for the massive numbers of registered voters who sat out this year's election altogether, however.

Turnout statewide was 31.1 percent, shattering the previous record low of 41.9 percent for a presidential primary, recorded in 1996. State figures track balloting since 1914.

Mark DiCamillo, Field Poll director, predicted bare-bottom turnout – he pegged it at 35 percent – shortly before ballots were cast.

There were few fireworks on this year's ballot: California was insignificant to the Republican presidential contest,

President Obama had no challenger among Democrats, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein faced no serious opposition, and there were few hot-button issues to bolster turnout.

Neither Proposition 28, involving changes to legislative term limits, nor Proposition 29, a proposed tobacco tax, was likely to drive up turnout significantly, DiCamillo said last month.

Though worst for a presidential primary, this year's turnout did not scrape bottom for any statewide election in California. The all-time low – 28.2 percent of registered voters – was set in June 2008, state records show.

Counties with the highest turnout in last month's election were Sierra, 59.2 percent; Alpine, 58.6 percent; and Amador, 57.1 percent. Voter participation was lowest in the counties of Los Angeles, 21.8 percent; San Bernardino, 23.7 percent; and Orange, 26.5 percent.

All four capital-area counties topped California's 31.1 percent voter turnout. El Dorado's turnout was 46.2 percent; Placer, 45.7 percent; Yolo, 37.7 percent; and Sacramento, 35.6 percent.