

Clinton edges out Sanders to win Nev. caucuses



Precinct No. 35, representing Glenbrook, caucuses on Feb. 20 at Whittell High School. Photo/LTN

By Lisa Lerer and Ken Thomas, AP

Hillary Clinton edged out Bernie Sanders on Saturday in Nevada's caucuses, capitalizing on a more diverse Democratic electorate to propel her to a crucial win in her presidential bid.

In Nevada, thousands packed schools, casinos and hotels to vote, including scores of first-time caucus-goers who favored Sanders. The state party said more than 31,000 registered online to participate.

A Whittell High School in Stateline more than 200 people showed up to caucus. They were then broken up into precincts.

"It was especially crazy because they didn't have a computer

system to check in," one Tahoe participant told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We had 21 people in our precinct No. 36 that is Skyland, Cave Rock, Hidden Woods. Bernie supporters needed at least six to be viable in our group, but there were only four or five supporters after the first alignment, so our two precinct votes went for Hillary."

Clinton on Twitter said, "To everyone who turned out in every corner of Nevada with determination and heart: This is your win. Thank you."

Sanders, who called to congratulate Clinton, said he was proud of his campaign, which turned a 25-point polling deficit into a close election.

"I am also proud of the fact that we have brought many working people and young people into the political process and believe that we have the wind at our back as we head toward Super Tuesday," he said.

Clinton prevailed in the third contest of the primary campaign with the backing of women, union workers, minorities, moderates and voters who are certain that the former secretary of state will have a better shot at winning in November, according to entrance polls.

Marvin Teske, a 53-year-old security guard at a Reno casino, said he worried that Sanders would have trouble beating the Republican nominee in the fall. The Vermont senator largely appeals to white liberals, a relatively narrow swath of the Democratic Party.

"As far as being too far left, I agree with a lot of the stuff he has to say. But the problem I have is that all the stuff he is promising is never going to happen," Teske said. "I've always liked Hillary."

The Clinton victory in Nevada underscored the challenge for Sanders as the campaign shifts to Southern states, including

South Carolina on Feb. 27. Polling shows minority voters, a crucial bloc of the Democratic electorate, heavily favoring Clinton.

After three contests, Clinton has a narrow win in Iowa, a double-digit loss in New Hampshire and now momentum from Nevada that should attract the support of many of the Democratic superdelegates. She has won over a number of the 714 superdelegates as both candidates push toward the 2,383 needed to win the party nod.

Clinton's win in Nevada means she will pick up most of the state's delegates. With 35 at stake, Clinton will gain at least 18. Sanders will pick up at least 14.

Three delegates remain to be allocated, based on votes in the congressional districts.

Clinton installed staff on the ground last spring, but Sanders' message of combating income inequality appeared to resonate in a state where many voters are still struggling to rebound after years of double-digit unemployment.

Entrance polls of voters found that a third said the economy was their major concern, while a quarter cited income inequality – the centerpiece of the Sanders' campaign.

"If Ronald Reagan can smash the American Dream from right field, then Bernie can build it back up from left field," said Dale Quale, a 60-year-old unemployed former slot machine technician who estimated that he had made 800 phone calls for the Vermont senator before the caucus.

Whites were split between the two candidates. Sanders did well with self-identified independents and two-thirds of those participating in a caucus for the first time.

The candidates spent their final hours before the caucuses furiously trying to drive up turnout among their supporters.

Clinton almost crossed paths with Sanders at Harrah's casino Saturday morning less than an hour before the caucuses began. Sanders slipped into an employee cafeteria to shake hands with workers. About 10 minutes later, Clinton came in to do the same.

The polling survey was conducted for AP and the television networks by Edison Research.

Lake Tahoe News contributed to this report as did Associated Press writer Nicholas Riccardi.