

McKinley Dems trounce; voter turnout low

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 24 June 2016 05:35



Less than 30 percent of registered vote in primary

McKinley County Democrats fervently backed incumbents in the June 7 primary election, sending familiar names back to the Roundhouse in January. McKinley's sole race featuring a Republican was related to the 11th Judicial District seat.

But the real story in McKinley County was the low number of voters who turned out for the primary, both Democratic and Republican.

The cost to put on the election was around \$80,000, according to Rick Palochak, executive director of the McKinley County Bureau of Elections.

The canvassing process now moves on to the state, as required by law, Palochak said. The McKinley County Board of Commissioners and two county workers participated in the canvassing, or certification, he noted.

"It was definitely a rather low number in terms of turnout," Palochak said. "There are probably a lot of reasons that can explain why, but I think most of all, it's related to a certain age group, and by that I mean the younger generation."

Palochak said there are 24,940 registered Democrats in McKinley County, and of that number, 6,314 voted in the primary. The voter turnout wasn't any better on the Republican side. Of the 6,077 Republicans registered to vote in McKinley County, just 1,069 showed up on June 7.

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There are 937 people registered in the Green and Libertarian Parties of McKinley County.

“It’s the age range from 18 to about 26 that doesn’t have a lot of turnout,” Palochak said. “If that age bracket increases, then the final [vote tally] numbers increase.”

McKinley County has been widely considered a Democratic stronghold over the years, with very few Republicans holding office at any level. The sole Republican to hold a state legislative seat over the years is Sharon Clahchischiliage of Kirtland, a rare female Navajo Republican who lost the 2016 primary to retired educator and newcomer GloJean Todacheene of Shiprock.

Attorney Marcela Ben-King was a Democratic write-in candidate facing incumbent Republican District Judge Lyndy Bennett. Bennett was appointed to the seat by Gov. Susana Martinez after Grant Foutz vacated the post to the 11th Judicial District. Ben-King garnered 755 votes and will face Bennett in the November general election. The sole other Republican in an area race was Bradford Dalley of San Juan County who ran unopposed in the primary.

Incumbent Sen. George Muñoz, Democrat of District 4, reclaimed his seat with a near 63-percentage win over newcomer Felicia Adams of Iyanbito and Jordon Johnson of Vanderwagen. That race saw racism claims by the Navajo-born Adams and a petition challenge by Muñoz that stands to be acted on soon.

Palochak said there were no problems with McKinley’s Dominion ImageCast precinct machines.

“They worked fine,” he said.

Regarding the general makeup of the New Mexico legislature, the GOP took control of the House of Representatives in 2014 at the same time Martinez was elected to a second term.

Currently, Republicans control 37 House seats out of a total of 70. Dems are the majority in the Senate with a 24 - 18 advantage.

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The general election is Nov. 8.

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