

McKinley primary winners take low roads to victory

Written by By Bernie Dotson
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Officials in McKinley County always seem to predict that each election cycle will be better than the last. Which is to say, the voters are out there — it's just a matter of time before they go to the polls.

A look at the most recent area election dictates that old adages don't ring true when it comes to McKinley County.

Is it apathy? Is it voter distrust or intimidation? You be the judge as to why folks just don't vote.

There are more than 30,000 registered voters in McKinley County and not many of them went to the polls June 7 to decide races related to the McKinley County Board of Commissioners and beyond — from district judges to seats in the Senate and House of Representatives of the New Mexico Legislature.

About a quarter of registered Democrats voted in the primary, and even fewer Republicans. McKinley County Elections Director Rick Palochak said he believes that if voters in the 18- to 26-year-old range came out to do their civic duty, the primary results may have been that much better.

"I think that's where things get interesting," Palochak said. "I'm for taking a closer look at that demographic."

Let's do that, to some degree, Rick. In two of the more publicized races, that for Senate District 4 and House District 5, there were some interesting dynamics at play.

The state Senate race between incumbent George Muñoz, Felicia Adams, and Jordon Johnson was truly something to keep your eyes on. Adams accused Muñoz of running a racist campaign when Muñoz failed to attend a political forum Adams invited him to. Prior to that, Muñoz accused Adams of having faulty signatures on a required petition form, which led to multiple district attorney investigations.

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The real story, overlooked in that race, was that even though Muñoz won the contest with close to 65 percent of the vote, it was nothing compared to the close to \$75,000 he spent via campaign funds. That is, in spite of the 65-percent winning percentage, coupled with the thousands of dollars spent by Muñoz, there wasn't a super-majority of voters who came out to the polls.

The situation was similar in the District 5 House of Representatives race, featuring incumbent D. Wonda Johnson of Church Rock and Kevin Mitchell of Tohatchi. Johnson won the race 52 to Mitchell's 48 percent, respectfully. But the fact that Johnson, who is from Crownpoint on the Navajo Nation Indian Reservation, won locales like Standing Rock by just 10 votes, to a degree, means that not a lot of folk in Johnson's neck of the woods bother to vote – or if they do vote, does it mean they voted for Johnson?

Johnson might want to keep an eye on Mitchell, as he will surely be back next time around and just might figure out a winning formula to capture the District 5 seat.

As expected, Mitchell, vice president of the Gallup-McKinley School County Board, carried the community of Tohatchi, but fell short a small number of votes in territories won by Johnson.

Who's to say if more voters had turned out, we wouldn't be looking at different winners in not only the House District 5 and Senate District 4 race, but other races as well?

There was no excuse for voters not to come out in droves on June 7. Let's hope things change come the Nov. 8 general election.

By Bernie Dotson