

Big crowds slow down Democratic caucusing in Idaho

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — The Idaho Democratic Party delayed the scheduled start time by nearly two hours for its busiest caucus site after lines of people waiting to get in stretched down the street for several blocks in downtown Boise.

Eager voters who arrived in line after 7 p.m. — the scheduled time for caucus proceedings to begin— were turned away by party officials. Meanwhile, some people were filling out their ballots while standing in line in chilly winds rather than wait to caucus for their candidate.

Ada County, the state's largest Democratic region, was still caucusing as of 10 p.m. It was unknown when they would be finished.

Dozens of Sanders supporters sat cross-legged on the floor of the Center on the Grove, while chanting "We want Bernie."

Rep. Hy Kloc, D-Boise, said Sanders is inciting a peaceful, political revolution.

"He's an old Jewish, white guy, who has energized the country," Kloc said. "It's incredible."

However, Hillary Clinton fans also showed up to cheer and vote for their candidate.

Frances West, 84, said she's voting for Clinton because it wasn't that long ago she was making less compared to the men in her workplace.

"What she has done for women is incredible," she said. "I am so proud of her, I love Hillary. She is a fighter."

State Democratic Party leaders are hoping for a repeat of 2008, which saw a record number of caucus-goers. Signs suggest they're on track.

Four of Idaho's most populated counties had to make last-minute changes to expand or add new caucus venues to accommodate the expected large crowds.

"Interest in Idaho in recent weeks has really ramped up," party spokesman Dean Ferguson said.

However, full crowds are not expected in eastern Idaho, which has a robust Republican stronghold and a high Mormon population. Ten counties east of more liberal-leaning Ada County had split into five pairs to share caucus locations Tuesday.

Clinton has had an active campaign in the state for several weeks, and Sanders spoke at two rallies in Idaho in the past few days. Those efforts could encourage both new and longtime Democrats to participate in the caucus.

Ferguson expects to match or exceed the turnout from 2008, when a rare visit by a presidential candidate — Barack Obama — whipped up interest in the state. About 21,000 people attended the Idaho Democratic caucus that year, up from only 5,000 in 2004.

This year, organizers in Kootenai County, which includes the city of Coeur d'Alene, added a second caucusing site to ensure there's enough room for attendees. Bannock County officials moved their caucus from Idaho State University to a bigger venue. Buses will be available to ferry participants from the university campus to the new Fort Hall site, organizers say.

Canyon County party officials will use more of their venue — a local school — than originally planned. Ada County officials initially reserved a downtown event center but now have also reserved a sports arena next door and the outdoor space between the buildings.

Caucus-goers will decide among four options: Clinton, Sanders, De La Fuente and uncommitted. Spokespeople for the candidates will debate and attempt to sway attendees to join their groups.

Candidates must get at least 15 percent of the participants to qualify for any delegates. The delegates chosen at the county caucuses will support their candidate at the state Democratic convention, and from there, 27 delegates will be awarded to go to the national nominating convention.

Idaho's younger voters seem energized by Sanders, while Clinton appears to have lifelong Democrats excited, Ferguson said. Both campaigns have devoted resources to Idaho.

Associated Press writers Kathryn Haake and Rebecca Boone contributed to this report.

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