

GOP releases convention results after lengthy delay

Block, Dow will top Republican primary ballot for governor

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JOURNAL CAPITOL BUREAU

SANTA FE — A New Mexico Republican Party convention intended to bring a key election cycle into clearer focus turned instead into what one candidate described as “chaos and dysfunction” on Saturday due to lengthy delays in voting and vote-counting.

Nearly eight hours after candidates finished giving speeches to delegates in Ruidoso, the state GOP announced it would delay releasing vote results in the interest of “election integrity.”

The party issued a news release just before 11 p.m. announcing that Jay Block received the most votes in the race for governor, 29%, and will top the ballot. Rebecca Dow and financial

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adviser Greg Zanetti also received enough votes to be on the ballot, garnering 28% and 23%, respectively, the release said.

The handling of the pre-primary convention prompted criticism — from both within and outside the Republican Party — and references to lawsuits possibly being filed by candidates.

Mark Ronchetti, a former KRQE-TV meteorologist who is one of the five Republicans running for governor, described the GOP convention that drew 748 delegates from around New Mexico as “just another example of a flawed process.”

He said he already has submitted enough voter signatures to ensure he also ends up on the primary election ballot and urged delegates Saturday to “get as many people on that ballot” as possible.

“When you have the party elite trying to go in and decide who’s going to be on the ballot ... that doesn’t serve anybody well,” Ronchetti said in an interview, referring to party rule changes that limited who could cast votes at the convention.

Dow acknowledged the voting delays, but described the GOP convention as a high-energy event and said many Republicans waited in Ruidoso for hours in hopes of finding out results.

“My message was that it’s time for a course correction and smaller government,” said Dow, a three-term state representative from Truth or Consequences.

The protracted delay in voting — and vote tabulating — was caused by “glitches” with the electronic voting system used by the state Republican Party that prompted a switch to paper ballots, a state GOP spokesman said.

While Republican Party spokesman Mike Curtis described the switch as smooth, several candidates described the process as choppy and said many delegates left the convention before it was announced.

The state Democratic Party, which will hold its own convention next weekend, blasted Republicans in a news release for their “stunning incompetence.”

GOP feeling optimistic

The convention drama came as Republicans are feeling optimistic about this year’s election cycle, banking that a new crop of candidates and voter discontent with Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and other Democratic elected officials will translate to favorable results come November.

Several GOP candidates took aim at Lujan Grisham during their Saturday remarks, with Block, a Sandoval County Commissioner, reportedly calling the governor an “evil witch” and vowing to undo some of her policies through executive order if elected.

Also vying for the Republican nomination is anti-abortion advocate Ethel Maharg.

However, Democrats have posted big wins in recent election years and entered this year holding all statewide elected offices and significant majorities in both chambers of the Legislature.

Whoever wins the Republican Party's nomination for governor on June 7 would square off against Lujan Grisham, who is running unopposed, in the general election. Two Libertarian candidates have also filed to run for governor.

The Saturday preprimary convention was a first step in the nominating process, and it also sets the ballot order for the primary election. Candidates who fail to win 20% of the delegate vote are required to submit a larger number of voter petition signatures if they still want to qualify for the ballot.

Ronchetti said he submitted more than 7,000 voter signatures to the Secretary of State's Office when he filed to run for governor this month — or more than twice the amount necessary to ensure he would appear on the primary ballot.

Other races in contention

In addition to governor, delegates also voted Saturday on contested GOP primary races for lieutenant governor and two of New Mexico's three congressional districts. The candidates for the Albuquerquebased 1st Congressional District seat are Michelle Garcia Holmes, Louie Sanchez and Jacquelyn Reeve. Sanchez and Garcia Holmes both received enough delegate votes to appear on the ballot. In addition, several Republicans are running unopposed for the primary election.

That list includes U.S. Rep. Yvette Herrell, the lone Republican member of New Mexico's congressional delegation.

It also includes secretary of state candidate Audrey Trujillo of Corrales, attorney general candidate Jeremy Gay of Gallup, state treasurer candidate Harry Montoya of Santa Fe and land commissioner candidate Jefferson Byrd of Tucumcari.

Jay Block

Rep. Rebecca Dow

Mark Ronchetti