

What Did Iowa Voters Think of the Iowa Caucus?

The first-in-the-nation Iowa Republican Caucus brought voters from all corners of the Hawkeye State, from all walks of life, together for a couple of hours Monday night to begin the process of nominating the candidate who they hope will be the next president of the United States.

Six of those voters agreed to share with *Charisma Caucus* readers their thoughts on the process, the outcomes, and what it means for the remainder of the 2016 presidential campaign. They began the online forum discussion about an hour before the caucus was slated to begin.

Although not as impactful as was originally feared a week earlier, the weather did play a role at a couple of the voters' precincts, but didn't have any impact on what was a record-breaking turnout. Turnout seemed to be on a record-setting pace from the outset.

Jane Jensen, a medical professional who travels the country for work, but resides in Clarinda in southwestern Iowa, said, "We were a little late starting. Had some new folks and some switching parties. Great turnout!"

Almost immediately, however, it was evident that Donald Trump's much-hyped ground game wasn't as good as advertised.

About 15 minutes before the scheduled start of his precinct caucus, Shawn Dietz, a former Iowa legislative candidate who works for a pro-Ted Cruz Super PAC and lives in Franklin County, said, "We are at standing room only here now, and there is no evidence of Trump support. No stickers, no signs ... Cruz, Jeb and Carson are well-represented with materials."

Doug Goff, a veteran and telecommunications worker from

Knoxville, said, "Knoxville, Iowa, is packed. We have overflow; more than we can believe. Lots of Rubio and Cruz supporters, but little support for Trump."

Dietz responded a few minutes later to note that no one spoke on Trump's behalf at his precinct caucus. Within an hour, most of the precincts had concluded their vote tallies. Cruz won nearly all of them.

Steve Sherman, who was a precinct caucus chairman in North Liberty, Iowa, said, "Cruz won huge here."

Jacob Hall, a sports journalist from Sioux Center, was involved early on with problems at some of the caucus sites in Sioux County in northwestern Iowa. He said college students were told, and allowed, to show up prior to the 7 p.m. start of the caucus, vote, and leave.

Iowa GOP officials are already looking into the issue, which appears to stem from an email sent out by a local college professor.

Nearly 1,600 people voted at Hall's caucus site. But he was disappointed by the outcome of the vote, which went in favor of Rubio.

"I'm disappointed in my community," he said. "As Christian conservative as it gets in Northwest Iowa and they went Rubio, who is pro-amnesty. The Sioux County economy relies on illegal immigrants we've been told.

"I pray the day never comes that it becomes financially beneficial to build a Planned Parenthood clinic."

As the results were being reported, it was quickly evident the polls missed some key voting groups. Aaron Sewell, a former youth pastor who is now studying elementary education and lives in West Des Moines, said he hoped the pollsters could find a way to work out the kinks to improve their reporting

ability.

“They need to remember were in a new age of tech,” he said. “There was a lot of confidence the last few days. The Des Moines Register was spot on practically in 2014, but missed a few key points this time. They’re different scenarios, of course, and other polls were also off.

“But it’s part of the fun for political junkies and professionals, though. Comparing what’s right, accurate and wrong.”

When asked how to improve the polling—given today’s reliance on mobile technology, such as smartphones—Sewell said he wasn’t sure if it was possible.

“Calling landlines was easier,” Sewell said. “Now people are so connected to cells, social media, email that it may take a different method of sampling to get it accurate. There’s no silver bullet answer, but maybe these caucus results and polls can help in the future.”

Hall and Sherman both said they would like to see the polls go away permanently.

Once the final results were being reported, the group took the time to answer a few questions about the final tallies. First, they were asked to respond to the turnout numbers, which totaled nearly 185,000.

“The strong field produced that turnout,” Dietz said. “There was a lot for the ‘fractured’ base to get excited about.”

Jensen said she thought it was indicative of the voters’ dissatisfaction with the government. Sherman said his precinct ran out of voter registration forms and had to have more printed out for the standing-room-only crowd.

Next, they discussed Ted Cruz’s victory.

"Retail campaigning works," Dietz said. "I've put on more than 5,000 miles in the past five months, and I've literally watched this guy win over the skeptics with a handshake and a conversation."

Sherman suggested Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad was likely not happy about the outcome, which brought up the topic of his ineffective effort to dissuade Iowans to vote for Cruz. That effort was precipitated by the Texas senator's opposition to renewable fuel mandates.

"It gave him the victory," Jensen said. "Imagine if Trump had done the same."

"Branstad is the biggest loser in the state tonight," Dietz added.

This brought the conversation to the topic of the Republican Party establishment, a sore point for many of the participants. Asked if the voting results, which showed two-thirds of voters supported "anti-establishment" candidates, was a repudiation of the GOP establishment, Dietz said:

"Without a doubt a repudiation of Branstad's attempts to thwart and reject the grass-roots conservatives that he has been undermining since he returned to office."

But Goff wasn't so sure. He said, "Rubio has a strong ground game and a great message. Many people I talked to said Rubio was second choice and most likely to win. I think when the lower tier starts dropping, Rubio will do much better."

"The establishment is not in fashion," Sherman added. "I'm sick of the whole thing. Rubio better distance himself from [RNC Chairman Reince Priebus] as much as he can."

Next, the group discussed the inconclusive result of the Democrat caucus vote, which at the time showed Hillary Clinton leading by about 1 percentage point.

"I think it spells trouble for Iowa Democrats if they can't separate themselves from a self-described socialist," Dietz said. "At least I hope it does."

Sherman agreed with that sentiment, but Goff said he wasn't so sure. He said he considers Sanders the stronger of the two Democrat candidates.

Asked if Cruz could declare a mandate based on a 28-percent vote in Iowa, most agreed he couldn't—at least not yet.

"Not alone, but combined with Carson's 10 percent and Paul's 4 percent, I think the message is strong," Dietz said. "Also, I don't view Rubio as a solid establishment guy. When was the last time an establishment guy used eliminating the Department of Education as part of his pitch?"

"Or praising Jesus?" Sherman asked.

In closing, the Iowa voters said they thought the state had a "great night," and that they're simultaneously glad the primary process has now moved on to New Hampshire. They were proud of their fellow Republicans for turning out in large, record-breaking numbers.