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The Votes Are In: Results of Utah's 2022 Conventions

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Utah's Democratic and Republican Parties have wrapped up their respective conventions to select candidates for the 2022 election. However, some candidates within each party will head to the June primaries to determine who will become the official party candidate. Below are highlights on key races.

Utah Republican delegates endorsed Sen. Mike Lee in his campaign to be reelected to the US Senate. Lee captured nearly 4,000 Republican state delegates' votes at the April 23 convention, or 75% of GOP delegate votes, to become Utah's GOP senate nominee. While Lee won by an overwhelming margin at the convention, he nevertheless faces a primary challenge in June. Republicans Ally Isom and Becky Edwards both gathered the required 28,000 Republican signatures to bypass the convention, allowing them to have their names placed on the June primary ballot.

In an unusual move, Utah's Democratic Party chose not to endorse a candidate for US Senate at their state convention. Instead, the party endorsed independent candidate Evan McMullin. McMullin gained popularity in Utah in 2016 as he emerged as an alternative to then presidential candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Utah Democrats are hoping that endorsing an independent who leans to the right will be enough to unseat Lee in the general election should he survive the primary.

In the US House races, all four Republican incumbents will face a primary challenger. Rep. Chris Stewart captured 80% of the vote from delegates but will face a challenge from Erin Rider, who gathered enough signatures to be placed on the ballot. Rep. John Curtis gathered only 45% of delegate votes. However, his opponent, former state legislator Chris Herrod, with 55% of the delegate vote, fell shy of garnering the 60% majority required to win the official party endorsement, so the two candidates will face off during the June primary.

Freshman Congressman Blake Moore held on by a mere percentage point in his race to hold his seat. Challenger Andrew Badger received 59% of the delegate vote and advanced to a primary against Moore and Tina Cannon. Cannon gathered enough signatures to be placed on the ballot. Fellow newbie to Washington, Cong. Burgess Owens easily defeated his challenger Jake Hunsaker as Owens received 68% of the delegate vote at the convention. However, Hunsaker gathered the requisite signatures and will face off against Owens again in the primary.

Utah has depended on the caucus/convention system to select party

candidates for decades, but a law passed in 2014 allowed candidates to bypass the convention if they succeeded in securing the requisite signatures. Party delegates have complained about the law, arguing that it dilutes their power to pick their candidate. Others have championed the signature path, stating the law allows the general party members to have more influence on candidates and not just the delegates. However, some Republicans continue to hope the legislature will repeal the law that allowed for the signature path, but efforts to do so have not gained traction at the state capitol in recent years.

In state legislative races news, the conventional wisdom in Utah's political world was that Republican state senator Daniel Thatcher would face a tough challenge to save his seat at the convention. Thatcher opposed a bill that placed a state ban on transgendered athletes from participating in high school sports and admitted publicly that his opposition may cost him his seat. Thatcher, though, was able to hold on to the Republican nomination, receiving just enough votes to reach the 60% threshold, enabling him to skip the primary to become the Republican nominee in November.

In other legislative races, Senate Majority Leader Evan Vickers was pushed to a primary as was Senate Majority Whip Ann Milner. Other senate Republicans Kirk Cullimore, Scott Sandall, and Ron Winterton all secured the nomination and will advance straight to November.

In Republican state house races, Rep. Keira Birkeland defeated Logan Wilde as she netted 70% of the delegate vote. Wilde held the seat prior to Birkeland but did not gain any traction with this year's delegates. Birkeland was the sponsor of the state's ban on transgendered athletes legislation. She will still face a primary against Raelene Blocker who gathered signatures.

House members that will face a Republican primary in June include Kelly Miles, who will go up against Katy Hall. Incumbent Christine Watkins will face off against Tom Hansen.

Two seats without an incumbent will have primaries. Bridget Bolinder will go up against Mark Huntsman (who currently serves on the state school board) for a House seat that covers Tooele and other rural areas of the state. Kimberley Cozzens and Jason Kyle will compete in June to fill the seat to replace Rep. Steve Waldrip, who intended to run for reelection until last week when he withdrew his name from the election to pursue professional aspirations.

Republican Rep. Steven Handy, the only incumbent to be defeated, did not gather signatures to secure a place on the primary ballot. The decision to not obtain signatures means he has been eliminated from further consideration in the election and will complete his term in office at the end of this year.

Primary elections will be held June 28th.

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