

Trump Wins Iowa Caucus, DeSantis Takes Second With Haley Close Third

January 16, 2024 by [Dan McCue](#)



Iowa Caucus in Des Moines on Jan. 15, 2024. Photo by Dan McCue

DES MOINES, Iowa — Former President Donald Trump scored a decisive victory in the Iowa Republican caucuses Monday night, defeating all comers, including challengers Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis, who battled for much of the night for a distant second place.

Trump's victory, of course, had been a foregone conclusion for months, with his lead in the polls never challenged.

That made the race for second the most intriguing contest of the night, and the biggest surprise was the tightness of the race between the current Florida governor, DeSantis, and the former South Carolina governor, Haley.

As of 5:00 p.m. EST, Trump had 51% of the vote, DeSantis was second with 21.2%, Haley third with 19.1% and Vivek Ramaswamy fourth with 7.7%.

Ramaswamy has announced he is dropping out of the race and has endorsed Trump.

None of the other candidates in the race, former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, businessman Ryan Binkley, or former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who has already suspended his campaign, received more than 0.7%.

If there was a consolation prize for those at the end of the pack, it went to Binkley, the candidate who received that 0.7%. Hutchinson, meanwhile, just beat “other” at 0.2%.

Underscoring the magnitude of his victory, Trump won all 99 of Iowa’s counties.

Though 8:00 p.m. local time Monday was too early to assess the overall turnout, there were numerous reports that caucus precincts in the state’s most populous areas were crowded.

The record for turnout in the Iowa Republican caucuses is 186,000, set in 2016, when there was a spirited race on the GOP side.

As of 8:08 p.m. local time, the turnout stood at 38,336, with just 11 counties reporting counting was completely done.

The early return of the results was something that had been touted heavily by precinct monitors ahead of Monday night’s caucuses.

In fact some went as far as predicting they would be done and driving back to their homes long before the late local news came on.

“Well it depends on which precincts you’re talking about,” said Iowa GOP Chairman Jeff Kaufmann.

“If it’s one of the big supersites — in one of our bigger metropolitan areas, maybe not ... but you know, as a general rule, if someone told me those predictions, I’d say, ‘Probably, okay.’”

Kaufmann, who was supervising his third Iowa caucuses as chairman, attributed his party’s ability to get the vote counted early to “200-plus face-to-face training sessions and probably thousands of individuals mentoring by phone.

“We also have a caucus night war room and anticipate that we’re going to have hundreds of calls coming in,” he said.

“The war room — actually, a call center — will be staffed by volunteers ready to answer almost any question, from what to do if our [vote-recording] app isn’t working ... right down to where the bathroom is in the precinct,” Kaufmann joked.

“We have backup after backup,” Kaufmann said. “I mean, we’ve basically been preparing for this for probably a year now.”

The Iowa Democrats’ reporting process notoriously collapsed in 2020, a breakdown that prevented the party from releasing full results for their caucuses for days.

The caucusing itself wasn’t the problem. The snafu stemmed entirely from the new app through which precincts were supposed to report their results. When it failed, backup phone lines were jammed and the results unobtainable.

The situation was compounded by the fact that when the results were finally tabulated, they were rife with the type of errors and inconsistencies that are a byproduct of manual calculations done swiftly.

To rectify the situation, the party had to conduct a partial recanvassing of the votes and that process was followed by a partial recount.

“Unlike the state Democratic Party, we developed our own app,” Kaufmann said. “They were handed theirs by the Democratic National Committee.

“We also recognized that some of the older folks we have working at the polls may not be as computer literate or internet savvy as others, and in their case — despite the fact our app is very easy to use — we gave them the option of calling in the results the old-fashioned way.

“I mean, when it came to preparing for this ... there was just no stone left unturned,” he said.

Another factor contributing to the final numbers being known early is that there’s no distance or mail-in voting in the caucuses.

“When it comes to a caucus, you have to be very, very careful, otherwise it becomes something else,” he said. “That’s why the Democrats are going to have to have a political born-again experience ... or else they are going to lose this state for good.

“There is no such thing as a mail-in caucus. That’s a primary. And if we do that, then New Hampshire will jump ahead of us because they have their first-in-the-nation status written into their state Constitution.

“So ultimately, if we want to maintain the specialness that Iowa now enjoys, we have got to do a caucus. People know that,” he said.

Turning to the race itself, Kauffman conceded that given the prevailing story line — that Trump was “so far ahead” and the contest was basically for second place — “intuitively, you would think that maybe we wouldn’t have had the enthusiasm that we’ve had.

“To me, this felt a lot like 2016, which was a very competitive year in Iowa; it’s actually been surprising to me, the level of intensity that’s occurred — and despite the fact we had a frontrunner for the entire time.”

As party chair, Kauffman said, “I’m ecstatic about that.”

“Because it means that people are enthusiastic not only about wanting change, but also about the party and participating in the process, in addition to being excited about whatever candidate they’re picking,”

To many, this “enthusiasm” is seen as a sign that Iowa is growing more solidly red, just 15 years after then-Sen. Barack Obama’s victory there suggested a state more purplish in tinge.

“It has nothing to do with anything I’ve done; I’ve got Joe Biden,” Kauffman said. “On top of that, we have a state Democratic Party that seems to have forgotten the absolute, golden adage of politics, and that is all politics is local.

“I mean, we’ve got Democrats here — many of them old Kennedy Democrats, the old Truman Democrats, the old Blue Dogs — who have come to feel that Biden is taking orders from New York and California and pursuing increasingly extreme, progressive ideas,” he continued.

“And the thing is, the local Democratic Party is doing nothing to address those concerns, which is stunning to me, quite frankly,”

Kaufmann said. “I mean, why aren’t they tailoring their messaging to the more conservative base that exists here?”

“As a result, the majority of counties that used to be blue and go to the Democrats are now reliably red, and the Blue Dog Democrats ... lost their message and lost their home in this state.

“I wish I could tell you this was due to my genius as chair, but I’ve got to tell you, when it comes to piling up victories for my side, the most valuable player on my team is Joe Biden,” Kauffman said.

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