

Weber County voting, purely via mail-in ballots, unfolds quietly, without hiccups

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By Tim Vandeneck

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OGDEN — There were no lines of people. No filling of ovals with black or blue ink pens at portable tables.

There wasn't even any in-person voting, at least not in the traditional sense.

Tuesday was what was to have been Election Day, the day voters — those who don't mail in their ballots, at least — go to the polls to cast ballots for their preferred candidates. Instead, because of COVID-19, Tuesday this go-round was just the culmination of a mail-in primary election marked by the absence of rallies, debates, glad-handing and all the other markers of a traditional voting cycle. Many of the final ballots turned in won't even be counted until Wednesday or Thursday, after they sit a day in quarantine to guard against the coronavirus, meaning it may take a little longer to get complete results. Still, the voting process — highlighted by the race for the GOP nomination in the Utah gubernatorial contest and Democratic and Republican primaries in the 1st District U.S. House race — unfolded without incident. There were no major issues or hiccups, at least as of early Tuesday evening.

"It was fine," said Amy Burton of Plain City, one of the few voters who ventured Tuesday to the [Weber County Elections Office](#)'s drive-through ballot pick-up operation at the Weber County Fairgrounds.

Ryan Cowley, head of the elections office, also offered an upbeat assessment. "It's gone really good," he said.

Nikila Venugopal, voter rights coordinator for the [American Civil Liberties Union of Utah](#), visited a few of the drive-through sites around the state. The police at one of the Salt Lake County operations gave her pause, making her worry their presence could intimidate some. Otherwise, she reported no major issues. Indeed, she's looking ahead to the Nov. 3 general election, when she hopes the COVID-19 pandemic has eased to the point that in-person voting is again permitted.

"We need to have the in-person option as well," she said, noting that it's the preferred voting method for some. If mail-in voting's going to be the thing, she's also a proponent of sending voters ballots with prepaid return envelopes, now only done in some Utah counties. Thus, those sending in their votes wouldn't have to cover the cost of a stamp, a potential obstacle for some.

Weber County Clerk Ricky Hatch, who oversees the elections office, was at the drive-through ballot operation at the Weber County Fairgrounds for part of Tuesday. He heard no major griping or grumbling about the changed process. State lawmakers passed legislation in April turning the primary into a mail-in-only election to guard against the potential spread of COVID-19 that could occur with traditional in-person balloting.

"I think people realize because of COVID it's unusual times," he said.

Tuesday's operation, held in a Weber County Fairgrounds parking lot, allowed voters to get ballots if, for whatever reason, they didn't have them or needed new ones. The elections office mailed ballots earlier in June to all registered Democrats and Republicans in the county, about 72,000 people. The drive-through operation also allowed unaffiliated voters, those not registered with any party, to get ballots, and that seemed to account for the majority of the visits on Tuesday, according to Hatch and Cowley. Voters would remain in their cars, driving to one of six tents spread around the parking lot, where election workers would field their queries and, if merited, get them a ballot. The voters would then drive

off, many filling their ballots in their vehicles in the parking area and leaving them in a drop box at the site.

Kristin Schill of Roy, an unaffiliated voter, showed up, wanting to vote in the GOP gubernatorial primary. She kept her preference to herself but lauded the way Utah has handled voting.

“I’ve been really proud as a Utahn at how well we’ve handled everything. Go Utah!” she said.

Sally Peterson of Roy also showed up, with her dog Tig riding shotgun. She’s unaffiliated and also wanted to vote in the governor’s race. She lauded the mail-in system, saying health issues would prevent her from being able to wait in a line if there were only in-person voting.

“It might stop me from voting if I can’t mail it,” she said.

Contact reporter Tim Vandenack at tvandenack@standard.net, follow him on Twitter at [@timvandenack](https://twitter.com/timvandenack) or like him on Facebook at [Facebook.com/timvandenackreporter](https://www.facebook.com/timvandenackreporter).