

# The Salt Lake Tribune

## For once, Utah Democrats get the spotlight

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Utah may be redder than red. But the real winners of the state's Super Tuesday Primary were Utah Democrats.

Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. and lawmakers hitched the Western States Primary to Feb. 5 and scraped together more than \$3 million in the hope of making this flyover state more than a blip in the presidential nominating process.

It didn't work that way for the Republicans. Mitt Romney's opponents acknowledged his favored-son status and the GOP's winner-take-all primary math and still ended up flying over the state. Iraq timetables and the economy overtook public lands and energy as debate topics. And even Romney took the state for granted. After turning Utah into a call center for Iowa and New Hampshire and his personal \$5.2 million ATM, he slipped in and out of LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley's funeral the weekend before voters went to the polls.

"When you're competing in 21 contests, you have to pick your battles," says

Kirk Jowers, director of the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics.

Things went very differently for the Democrats.

Parachute ads and fuzzy pictures of Barack Obama's parents cut into the evening news. Chris Dodd and Bill Richardson stopped by for barbecue last summer. Bill and Chelsea Clinton hugged Utahns for Hillary. Obama opened three offices in the state and scheduled, and then deftly canceled, a rally on the day of the funeral. Instead, his wife, Michelle, brilliantly met with leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints two days later.

The results showed at the ballot. On Tuesday, nearly 125,000 Utahns voted in the Democratic contest - four times the number who voted in the last party primary. State party headquarters got calls from 300 voters angry to find they were registered as Republicans and could not switch in time to vote in the Democratic primary.

"Television advertising, headquarters, direct mail, volunteer activity - they were all much higher," says Utah Democratic Party Director Todd Taylor.

On election night, it was Utah's Democratic voters who got the attention of CNN Chief National Correspondent John King. Romney's 90 percent landslide

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was expected. But the battle between Clinton and Obama for the state's

23 pledged delegates was not.

"This is the only night of the year where we will use the words 'Democrat,' 'competitive' and 'Utah' in the same sentence," King said. "Let's enjoy it while we can."

Both Jowers and Taylor believe Utah should stick with Super Tuesday.

Without Romney turning Utah into a foregone conclusion, with another year of upsets in Iowa and New Hampshire keeping the races competitive longer, this sparsely populated interior state might actually matter.

Stranger things - such as Utah Democrats getting all the attention - have happened.

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