

Weber County move to Election Day voting at Union Station surprises, miffs some

By TIM VANDENACK, Standard-Examiner

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OGDEN — The decision to shift in-person Election Day voting in Weber County to Union Station is surprising some and causing confusion among others.

The Weber County Election Office has centralized in-person voting for Tuesday's presidential primary at Union Station in downtown Ogden for the first time. Last year and in other prior elections, in-person voting was offered at the five Weber County Library System libraries — in Ogden, Washington Terrace, Roy, North Ogden and Huntsville — and at the Weber County Fairgrounds. But as more people use mail-in ballots to vote and fewer people actually go to polling places to cast ballots, election officials decided to try voting at the sole location this go-round.

Polls opened at 7 a.m. for the Republican and Democratic presidential primaries and are to close at 8 p.m. Union Station is located at 2501 Wall Ave.

The shift to Union Station miffed Linda Povey of Washington Terrace, speaking Tuesday outside the locale. She had initially gone to what's been her usual polling place in recent years, the Pleasant Valley Branch library in Washington Terrace, only to find an empty parking lot. "There was no one and I saw a sign that said to go to Union Station and I said, 'What?'" she said.

Ultimately, she made it to Union Station to cast her ballot, but the change came as a surprise. She had the time and a vehicle to make it to Union Station, she said, "but many people do not have that luxury."

Morgan Rose of West Haven offered stronger words, calling the change "disgusting." She went to the Roy library to vote, finding a sign there directing her to Union Station, where she ultimately voted.

"They're simply making it hard for people to have their voices heard," Rose said. "I know there's a lot of people who wouldn't be able to get here."

An observer from the American Civil Liberties Union was even on hand at Union Station to observe how the change unfolds amid concerns of voter disenfranchisement brought on by the change.

Ryan Cowley, the head of the county election office, said Tuesday that he had fielded around 10 phone calls from people inquiring about the change. The new voting location is noted on the Weber County Election Office website, though not everyone apparently saw it, and Cowley said his office has tried to get the word out.

"Anytime you have change, there's going to be a little bit of a learning curve with that," he said. Complaints, confusion even, happen anytime there's a change in polling locations, he went on, but most people seemed to be able to adjust.

Diane Gibson of Pleasant View said voting at Union Station was a snap, with numerous poll workers to help handle incoming voters quickly. "I thought it was very well organized. Just walked right on through," she said.

Moreover, consolidating voting locations is hardly unprecedented. In 2012, Cowley said, in-person voting took place at 60 polling places scattered around Weber County, and that was narrowed through last year's elections to six sites, the five libraries and the fairgrounds. Cowley said county officials will review results of Tuesday's voting to determine if they stick with the sole Election Day voting location in the June primary and November general election later this year.

The change garnered attention at the Weber County commissioners meeting on Tuesday. Clerk-Auditor Ricky Hatch noted that mail-in voting now accounts for 90%-97% of balloting, with only 3%-10% at in-person sites. He also noted the cost of managing several in-person polling locations. "Those are expensive to run and take logistics and time," he said.

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