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Romney wins Iowa straw poll

- Story Highlights
- The poll is viewed as a test of candidates' organizational strength in Iowa
- Romney and Brownback invested the most resources in the straw poll
- Several candidates chose not to spend the money needed to win the contest

By Mark Preston
CNN Political Editor

AMES, Iowa (CNN) -- Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney won the Iowa Republican straw poll Saturday, giving his campaign a boost six months before the state holds its first-in-the-nation caucuses.

Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee came in second, followed by Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback.

Romney received 4,516 votes, or 31.5 percent of the total. But his victory was slightly overshadowed by low participation from GOP activists and the absence of several opponents.

Former New York City Mayor [Rudy Giuliani](#), Arizona Sen. [John McCain](#) -- as well as former Tennessee Sen. [Fred Thompson](#), an unannounced candidate -- chose not to spend the money needed to win the contest.


"It is a win," David Yepsen, political columnist with The Des Moines Register, said in an interview.

"But it is somewhat shallow, because his big opponents didn't show up. What does it mean to get in the ring and your opponents don't even show up," added Yepsen, who is considered the dean of the Iowa political press corps.

The straw poll was held on the campus of Iowa State University and is viewed as a test of organizational strength in Iowa. In almost every case, the candidates paid the \$35 per person fee charged to vote in the straw poll. It's a major fundraiser for the state Republican Party.

A malfunctioning voting machine delayed the release of the results by more than an hour, as GOP officials were forced to count more than 1,500 ballots by hand.

The candidates set up tents outside Hilton Coliseum to feed supporters, hand out campaign literature, T-shirts and stickers, as well as to allow people to escape the blazing sun.

 [Watch what CNN's Bill Schneider has to say about the Iowa straw poll »](#)

[Romney](#) and [Brownback](#) invested the most resources in the straw poll by paying for the privilege to erect massive tents near the voting entrance.

The former Massachusetts governor had a large outdoor stage with bands and other entertainment performing throughout the day.

Brownback offered air conditioning in his tent, which featured a stage for entertainment and a moon bounce and other activities outside for children. The other candidates had much smaller tents scattered around the coliseum.

In the middle of the day, the candidates each took the stage inside the coliseum to talk about their vision for America and urge attendees to vote for them.

Perhaps anticipating a poor showing at the event, California Rep. [Duncan Hunter](#) told CNN hours before the results were announced that he planned to continue his bid for the White House.

"I think for the guys who have spent a lot of money here getting their message out, they are going to have to judge whether or not they have done as well as they want to do," Hunter said. "For us, we consider this a start of a marathon. This is just the tip-off."

In the next 24 to 72 hours, the GOP presidential field could be winnowed if some of the candidates believe Saturday's showing is an indicator of the lack of support for their campaign.

The Iowa Democratic Party does not hold a similar event.

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