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Giuliani tops McCain in straw poll  
Summit Co. Republicans vote at Lincoln dinner

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AKRON - The Ohio State basketball game was the lone nail biter at the Summit County Republicans' presidential straw poll, which Rudy Giuliani won with 30.9 percent.

The former New York City mayor bested Arizona Sen. John McCain, who got 25.8 percent of the more than 800 paper ballots cast last night.

Fred Thompson, a former senator from Tennessee, placed a surprising third with 12.1 percent. Mitt Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, took 8.6 percent, followed by Newt Gingrich, the former speaker of the House of Representatives, with 8.2 percent.

With Ohio's limited role in selecting the nominee because of its comparatively late primary, the straw poll provided early input on which Republicans voters from a battleground state in the general election prefer.

Alex R. Arshnikoff, chairman of the Summit County Republicans, worried that the NCAA tournament game might prevent a large turnout.

"I had a nightmare we would have 14 people here," he told the crowd of roughly 900 people at the party's annual Lincoln Day Dinner.

The straw poll results largely aligned with a survey of Ohio voters released last week by Quinnipiac University, with the exception of Mr. Thompson, who doubled his level of support though the closest thing to a public campaign appearance for him is his ensemble role on the NBC show Law & Order.

Hanging over the event were the Republican losses in the 2006 election and the Iraq War.

The dinner's keynote speaker, House Minority Leader John Boehner (R., West Chester), compared the country's active and expensive military involvement in Iraq to the wearisome choices made during the Civil War by Abraham Lincoln.

"If we don't win in Iraq, we'll provide safe haven for terrorists in Baghdad," he said.

"We as Americans have no choice ... but to take on the enemy."

Ohio Auditor Mary Taylor, the only Republican candidate to win statewide last year, said the issues from the 2006 election will recur in 2008 but that during the next 15 months Iraq and the economy could become a GOP asset.

"I don't think it's a slam dunk that Democrats win," she said.

Of the 15 potential presidential candidates on the ballot, it appeared just the campaigns for Mr. McCain and Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback made any public efforts to sway voters at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in downtown Akron last night.

Former senator Mike DeWine, the chairman of Mr. McCain's Ohio organization, walked around the banquet hall while people ate their chicken cordon bleu and rice pilaf.

"He's the one candidate in this race who understands national defense," Mr. DeWine said.

"What we're electing is a commander in chief, someone who will make life and death decisions."

Before the dinner, students from Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, put on people's seats flyers for Mr. Brownback, who is against abortion and stem cell research.

"I believe he's the only solid conservative we have for president," said Christina Valentine, a senior at Franciscan who plans to join the Brownback campaign in Iowa when she graduates. "They others are very wishy-washy."

Mr. Brownback received 5.9 percent of the straw poll.

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