

Final Iowa results show Santorum with 34-vote lead - CNN.com

By the CNN Wire Staff
2012-01-19T11:32:27Z

CNN.com



Tune in at 8 p.m. ET Thursday for the CNN/Southern Republican Presidential Debate hosted by John King and follow it on Twitter at . For real-time coverage of the South Carolina primary, go to CNNPolitics.com or to the CNN apps for iPhone, iPad and Android or CNN mobile site.

(CNN) -- Rick Santorum finished the Iowa Republican caucuses 34 votes ahead of Mitt Romney, but results from several precincts are missing and the full actual results may never be known, according to a final certified tally released Thursday by the Iowa GOP.

The new numbers show 29,839 votes for Santorum and 29,805 votes for Romney, according to the party.

The initial returns from Iowa gave Romney a razor-thin 8-vote margin of victory over Santorum, reinforcing the former Massachusetts governor's frontrunner status and giving him a major momentum boost heading into the New Hampshire primaries. Romney went on to win New Hampshire easily, allegedly making him the first non-incumbent Republican in modern history to win the first two contests of the cycle.

Now history is being rewritten, casting a shadow over the first-in-the-nation caucuses and potentially shaking up the GOP race two days before the critical South Carolina primary.



Did Santorum win Iowa?
News of the new results is "very exciting,"

Santorum campaign spokesman Hogan Gidley told CNN. "The narrative for a long time has been that Mitt Romney was 2-0. ... If these results are true and Rick is ahead by 34 votes, then that's not the narrative anymore. There have been two states, two different victors."

Romney's 8-vote win was seen as "a huge victory," Gidley said. "By that standard, I guess 34 votes is just about a landslide in Iowa."

While Santorum now has a slight advantage, results from eight precincts were missing and will never be recovered -- a fact which leaves the question of who actually finished first in the caucuses unanswered.

"I congratulate Sen. Santorum and Gov. Romney on a hard-fought effort during the closest contest in caucus history," Iowa GOP Chairman Matt Strawn said in a written statement. "Our goal throughout the certification process was to most accurately reflect and report how Iowans voted."

Romney said in a written statement Thursday morning that the new results show a "virtual tie" between the two candidates.

"The results from Iowa caucus night revealed a virtual tie," Romney said. "I would like to thank the Iowa Republican Party for their careful attention to the caucus process, and we once again recognize Rick Santorum for his strong performance in the state."

"The Iowa caucuses, with record turnout, were a great start to defeating President Obama in Iowa and elsewhere in the general election," Romney added.

One week after Iowa's January 3 caucuses, Romney won the New Hampshire primary with nearly 40% of primary votes. In that contest, Santorum, a former Pennsylvania senator, finished in fifth place with 9%.

The South Carolina primary is scheduled for Saturday. The Palmetto State has picked the winner of every GOP nomination fight since 1980. Romney currently appears to be clinging to a dwindling lead there over former House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

A Republican debate will be held Thursday night in Charleston, South Carolina.

"The bottom line is, it's really going to make a boost to our campaign today and remind people just that we've been able to tackle and take on Mitt Romney head-on," Gidley said. "We are the alternative to him, and we plan on taking this into South Carolina and beyond and showing folks that we've got the message and the messenger that can beat the guy who's just writing checks, trying to buy a state."

Gidley said he can "understand how the Romney campaign is out there trying to marginalize the victory. I can understand he doesn't want that narrative out there, but it's a big win for our campaign and we're really excited about it."

CNN's Candy Crowley said she doesn't believe the Iowa development will change the big picture for the prospective nominees.

"I think it does give Rick Santorum bragging rights," she said. "Any time you can grab the headlines, that's a good thing." But, she said, the results are not that different from the close margin seen just after the caucuses.

© 2012 Cable News Network. Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. All Rights Reserved.