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Voter turnout drops to 5% as incumbents score victories in NJ primary



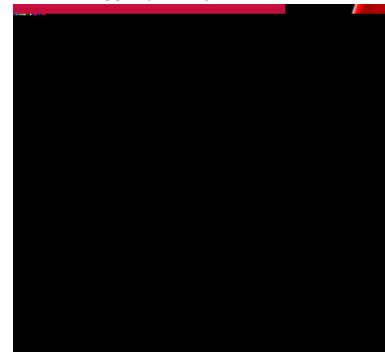
BY COLLEEN O'DEA, NJ SPOTLIGHT

One of the most ho-hum New Jersey state primaries in recent memory yielded no surprises, with all incumbents or party-backed candidates winning ballot positions on Tuesday. Those results, and the state's district makeups, should yield an equally lackluster general election in November in all but a handful of districts.

With Assembly races topping the ballot, turnout was expected to be low. That only five of the state's 40 districts had contested primaries for one party or the other did not encourage voter participation, although local races could have drawn voters to the polls. An analysis of preliminary estimates are that about 225,000 voters cast ballots, either in person or by mail. That's less than 5 percent of the state's 5.4 million voters, and about 9 percent of those voters registered as Democrats or Republicans. Only those registered with one of the major parties, or willing to declare for one of those parties on Election Day, can vote in New Jersey's primaries.

If these figures hold when all the votes are tallied, it would make Tuesday's primary the lowest turnout since the last time the Assembly topped the ballot, less

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than 15 percent of re

make significant inroads in the Legislature. I think many Republicans in the state are biding their time until 2017."

But other forces, including the expected low turnout itself, could shake up the status quo.

"The irony is that in low-turnout elections, when fewer people vote, the small, organized groups have