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GOP locals like Mr. 'Law & Order'

By Dan Williamson

Republicans here like *Law & Order* a lot more than they like John McCain.

The Franklin County GOP conducted a straw poll of 2008 presidential hopefuls during Friday night's Lincoln-Reagan dinner, an annual party fundraiser.

Organizers distributed ballots with the names of 14 potential Republican candidates in alphabetical order. Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who leads most national polls for the nomination, led the pack with 36 percent—141 out of 393 votes cast.

More surprising was the strong second-place showing of former Tennessee Sen. Fred Thompson, who's most famous for his career as an actor. Thompson, who plays district attorney Arthur Branch on *Law & Order*, was chosen by 22 percent of the Lincoln-Reagan attendees.

In third place was former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney (11 percent), followed by the man once considered the runaway GOP frontrunner, Arizona Sen. John McCain (7 percent).

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich pulled 6 percent, and former Central Ohio Congressman John Kasich, who was the keynote speaker for Friday's dinner, garnered 5 percent.

Party Chairman Doug Puisse said the poll was unscientific but not meaningless.

"The sampling was a real healthy cross

section of Republican activists," he said. "It was anybody who was at the dinner. Everything from millionaires to college Republicans to little old ladies."

Other than Thompson's strong showing, Puisse said he's impressed with the socially moderate to liberal Giuliani, who continues to defy "this conventional wisdom that he's going to falter because of the conservative base."

As for the weakness of McCain, Puisse said the senator might be hurt by how well-known he is.

"People know enough about McCain that, for whatever nitpicky reason, they're able to say they're not for him," Puisse said. "But they don't know enough about Fred Thompson yet to know why they're not for him."

He added, "McCain's certainly not out of this race," but his fate largely depends upon whether President Bush's current strategy in Iraq—of which McCain has been an outspoken

supporter—succeeds.

"It could snap back in his direction or it could snap back in his face," Puisse said.

Former Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson (3 percent) was the only other candidate to receive more than 10 votes in the straw poll. Several participants wrote in local politicians, such as City Council candidate Heidi Samuel (five votes), state Rep. Larry Flowers (two votes) and Congressman Pat Tiberi (one vote).

"Jim Tressel got one vote," Puisse said.



File/Ben French

He did beat the coach:
McCain finished fourth