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Moderate voter turnout expected in Framingham

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Framingham voter Mark Jariabko, 52, casts a ballot in the special election primary Tuesday late-afternoon at Keefe Tech High School in Framingham. (Matt Rocheleau for The Boston Globe)

By Matt Rocheleau, Globe Correspondent

Though polls have been nearly empty in other parts of the state today, Framingham officials predicted a moderate turnout for the special primary election to fill the US Senate seat left vacant by the late Edward M. Kennedy.

The Town Clerk's office estimated that 22 percent to 26 percent of the town's 33,933 registered voters would vote today, based on the number of votes cast as of mid-afternoon.

"Given the circumstances ... It's a pretty good turnout," said assistant town clerk Lisa Ferguson. "There's always a lot of political activity in Framingham"

She said the expected moderate turnout may be a result of US Senate candidates putting a special focus on campaigning in the state's most-populated town.

Four Democrats and two Republicans are vying to face off in the general election on Jan. 19 for the first open US Senate seat in Massachusetts in 25 years.

At Keefe Tech High School on Winter Street, among the busiest of the town's nine polling locations, those handing out ballots said the turnout was better than expected.

For Jody Collins, 41, voting was not a choice, but a responsibility.

"We came because we're American. We have to vote," she said, before casting a ballot in the Democratic primary.

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Collins, and nearly a dozen other Framingham voters, declined to disclose who they were voting for.

Kathy Paquette, 50, also decided to keep her vote private, but said voting is “important for every person if they want government to reflect their needs and values.”

However, some voting locations in Framingham, including Town Hall, were seeing the sort of turnout common across much of Massachusetts today.

Tom O’Neil, 83, a Town Meeting member and warden for the polling station at the Memorial Building on Concord Street, said he was outraged by the low number of voters who had cast a ballot at the polls at Town Hall.

“Certainly we deserve better than that. So do the candidates. This election is important. It reflects major issues,” said O’Neil, adding that he suspected the reason many did not vote was because of apathy towards politics.

Dan Gittelsohn, a 38-year-old Town meeting member, was also displeased at the low turnout at some locales in town and statewide.

“I believe we should make voting illegal in this country so maybe people would appreciate it. Take it away and then we’ll see where the outrage is. This is why we have the politicians we have,” he said. “They don’t care and that’s a shame.”

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