

Q&A: Secretary of State Katie Hobbs discusses election safety, registration

Shar Porier

September 21, 2019

sporier@myheraldreview.com



Secretary of State Katie Hobbs

Katie Hobbs had humble beginnings as a volunteer at her church and on to work as a social worker and chief compliance officer with one of the largest domestic violence centers in the U.S. She worked in the areas of domestic violence, behavioral health and homelessness. The focus of her life has been to help others to gain security, to be heard and to create better lives.

She has a Bachelor of Social Work from Northern Arizona University and a Master of Social Work from Arizona State University.

Hobbs also served in the state legislature in the state's House of Representatives and Senate.

She has been honored with dozens of awards for her service. Most recently, she was named the League of Cities and Towns Legislative Champion for two consecutive years (2017 and 2018).

Hobbs lives in Phoenix with her husband of 26 years Pat Goodman and their two kids Hannah and Sam, their dog and cats.

Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs talks about her tour of the Cochise County elections office Thursday.

Mark Levy/Herald/Review

BISBEE — As part of a statewide tour of Arizona’s counties, Secretary of State Katie Hobbs paid a visit to Cochise County this week to talk with the Elections Department and County Recorder about the 2020 election.

After her county visit, she met with the Herald/Review at the award-winning Copper Queen Library in Bisbee and complimented the staff on the honor of being named The Best Small Library in America 2019.

Jason Macoviak, library manager, and Allison Williams, grant program coordinator, met for a few minutes with Hobbs and staff members Allie Bones, assistant secretary and vice chairperson of the 2020 Census Complete Count Committee, and Murphy Hebert, director of communications. They talked with her and Hobbs expressed her admiration of the historic library and congratulated them on the award. Mocoviak invited them down for the big celebration of the Copper Queen Library’s honor on Friday, Sept. 27, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

“I love libraries,” Hobbs noted. “I love this building. Libraries are such a valuable community resource. As a kid, it was the one place that my parents would let me go unsupervised. I was excited every week to go with my mom and get new books. The summer reading programs are great for kids.”

She also said libraries are a great place to reach the public with information on the upcoming 2020 election and 2020 Census. “They are a key component of that.”

Herald/Review: Is there anything new in regard to the up-coming 2020 elections and voter registration?

Katie Hobbs: Nothing new. What we are focused on is making sure voter registration information is accessible to the public and make it as easy as possible for folks to register. So, we’re doing as much voter outreach as we can by working with the counties. We’re currently putting together a voter outreach committee to find gaps if there are any, and then work on filling those gaps. For instance, where voter outreach is working and where it’s not. We want to make sure the voters in the state are getting all the information they need.

People can register online and we have made the process easier.

HR: What has been done to protect the 2020 election from hacking?

KH: When I came into office, I knew it’s critical for us to rebuild relationships with the counties for all of us to work successfully on elections.

We know in 2016, there were a lot of problems. We’ve learned a lot and have put in place safeguards. We know that the 2018 elections across the country were the most secure than we have had in election history. We’re continuing to build on those lessons learned.

I feel pretty confident the system we have in place protects the voting process. We have good relations with state and federal law enforcement agencies that are specifically working on election cybersecurity because it has been named as a critical infrastructure need. There are a lot of federal resources in place.

We’ve been working with the counties to find out if they have any potential weaknesses. The Department of Homeland Security does make available free system assessments and will provide recommendations. So, we’re encouraging the counties to take advantage of that.

We have funding available through the Help America Vote Act for election security purposes. Any needed enhancements from those assessments can be funded through my office.

The overall election security grant was over \$7 million. The previous administration spent a lot on the state assessment and little of it trickled down to the counties.

We have two rounds of funding totaling around \$3.3 million with \$3 million for formula grants and \$300,000 for enhancement grants. Formula grants are based on the number of voters per county, which is the fairest way to distribute the money. Counties can apply for needed funding through Dec. 31.

HR: Is there a way to reassure voters their votes are counted correctly?

KH: Absolutely. That's a huge focus going into what we are working on. We have been accepted to participate in the National Governors Association election cybersecurity academy, so will be planning that in conjunction with the Governor's office. Arizona was one of five states selected. We're going to focus on the lines of communication. In the 2016 election, some of the threats that happened, there just wasn't good communication between the counties, the state and the public.

Some people think to this day there was actually a hack or a breach in the system. We have to set the record straight daily that there was not a breach. This whole issue around election security is the undermining of the public's confidence.

If voters believe the system is not secure, they're less likely to participate. Campaigns of misinformation undermine confidence and can change the outcomes of elections without hacking into the system. Communication to the public is critical so they know where they can get trusted information and where they can report information on something that looks fishy.

HR: Has the cancellation of the ballot for Republican Presidential Preference Election (PPE) been done before?

KH: It's not uncommon. There has not been a PPE for an incumbent president since Arizona started having them. President Bill Clinton had one (cancellation) in 1996, President George W. Bush in 2004 and then President Barak Obama in 2012. I wasn't surprised by it.

I think there are probably more people trying to run against this president as there has been in the past. Most of the challengers to a sitting president have been sort of fringe candidates. That's not the case this year. We have been talking with the state legislature in terms of the funding for it and the Republicans all told us they were going to cancel it. So, we knew it was coming. There was also a new deadline put in place by the legislators.

The Libertarian Party has opted out of the PPE and we're pretty sure the Green Party will not meet the deadline, Oct. 19. At that point, we're ready to put out a clear message who will participate.

We advocated for independents to vote in the state. There was absolutely no will to change that at the state. One third of our voters are independents. We all pay our tax dollars for elections, but they don't get to participate. They can vote in the Primary Election, but cannot vote in the PPE.

HR: What do you think of our little corner of the state?

KH: It's one of my favorite corners, but, I will say it was campaigning that got me here. I'm really happy about that and have a list of places I want to come back to when I'm not campaigning or working. Bisbee is definitely at the top of my list.



Copper Queen Library program coordinator Alison Williams chats with Secretary of State Hobbs during her visit to Bisbee last week.

Mark Levy | Herald/Review