

## Questionnaire for WA Secretary of State candidates 2022

### Steve Hobbs, 2022 Sec. of State

#### 1. What credentials and experiences prepare you for the position of Secretary of State?

From a young age I strove to serve my community and country. At the age of 17 I enlisted in the Army, and for 33 years have served our country in uniform. I have deployed to both Kosovo and Iraq and have witnessed firsthand the fragility of democratic institutions and why we must protect ours here at home. For nearly 15 years I honorably served in the Washington state senate, and recently chaired the senate transportation committee. My education includes both undergraduate and graduate studies at the University of Washington, as well as the Army Defense Information School and Command General Staff College. My roles working at the National Security Agency on active-duty orders and as a task force commander during the pandemic have reinforced my belief in competent, decisive, and compassionate leadership in times of crisis.

I was first elected to the state Senate in 2006. During my time in the legislature, I championed marriage equality, reproductive rights, housing affordability, equitable transportation, and our vote by mail election system. In 2017 When former Secretary of State Kim Wyman announced her resignation last fall, Governor Inslee appointed me to fill the newly created vacancy. The Governor's decision was based on a desired national security background as well as my reputation as a consensus builder in the state legislature. The call to help our most vulnerable friends and neighbors is why I entered public office.

#### 2. What are the cybersecurity dangers faced in WA State? What is your cybersecurity plan to provide election security for voters and results?

As your chief elections officer, the protection of our election system is my highest priority. Threats from criminals, terrorists, and nation-state actors are frequent and sophisticated against State and County networks. Disinformation is even being used as a weapon to disarm our defenses. Safeguards against cyber warfare and swift refutation of disinformation are more critical than ever. This legislative session, I worked with state leaders to make generational advances in tools, training, collaboration and personnel required to help protect our election system. Investments were necessary in this office and each of our counties to resist enemies who are aggressively working to sow doubt in our free and fair elections to undermine our democracy. We are leaning forward by deepening our partnerships with experts in this fight, including the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Administration and Washington Military Department, so we can prevent attacks and respond immediately to the barrage of thousands of attacks to our networks. I am focusing the expertise and power of my staff and partners to defend our state's 39 counties, which have become targets in an intentional campaign to weaken this democracy.

#### 3. What policies and practices will you initiate to expand voter registration and participation in WA?

Since accepting Governor Inslee's appointment to this office, my team and I have consistently identified the importance of increasing voter registration across our state. Increasing registration depends heavily on education and outreach efforts, and I am committed to providing dedicated resources that are unique to reaching every community. We will leverage proven communications by mail, text, radio, and TV to increase voter awareness of available tools like the online voter portal, [Vote.WA.gov](https://Vote.WA.gov). My staff has worked closely with our legislative partners, requesting additional funding specifically for voter education and outreach commitments. In addition to higher funding, we will also increase our visibility at naturalization

ceremonies and community events, and continue to ensure accurate translation services — a critical element in helping eligible voters understand the steps to registration. Voter registration is a critical step toward increasing community participation and engagement, and I will work tirelessly to ensure all Washingtonians have the resources to take this important step.

**4. Over 300,000 voters were removed from the rolls in WA State over the last several years. Do you support giving voters every opportunity to remain on the rolls – only removing them if/when it is clear they have moved or are no longer eligible? How will you ensure that voters are not removed unnecessarily?**

Approximately 90 percent of Washington’s voting eligible population is registered to vote, but voter registration offers us only a snapshot in time. Washington has a very mobile population, and each year our office tracks that: 10 – 15% of the population moves; approximately 94,000 people turn age 18; approximately 50,000 – 60,000 people die; and approximately 40,000 people change their name. Since voter registration data is so fluid, my office is committed to ensuring voters have the resources to monitor their voter registration status. Our staff oversee the [vote.wa.gov](http://vote.wa.gov) voter portal, which allows voters to register, confirm an existing registration, or update an address to make sure their ballot is properly distributed and counted. Our office is strongly committed to ensuring voters are not unnecessarily removed from voter rolls by monitoring the latest reports from the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC). In 2012, Washington was one of the original seven states which formed ERIC as a non-profit to improve the accuracy of state voter registration rolls and boost access to registration. ERIC identifies voters who have moved, voters who have died, and voters with duplicate registrations within a state's database, matching that data against data from other states and social security deaths. At least every 60 days, ERIC states also submit updated voter registration and motor vehicle licensing information. Today, ERIC membership has expanded to 30 states, including Colorado, Oregon, Ohio, Vermont, and Pennsylvania. Our staff remains committed to ensuring accurate data is received for the millions of registered Washingtonians exercising their right to vote.

**5. Many states have recently installed various voter suppression policies under the guise of fraud protection. Even some WA legislators introduced HB1377 to eliminate mail-in voting thus requiring people to vote in person. Further, it has been reported that substantially more ballots from people of color have been rejected than other populations.**

**A. What leadership will you provide to prevent these or other voter suppression policies from being adopted in WA State?**

**B. How will you address the discrepancy in ballot rejections based on matching signatures?**

**C. Please identify any other voter suppression policies that still exist in WA State and what can be done to ameliorate or eradicate such policies.**

It is frustrating that we have elected officials in our state introducing bills doing away with mail-in voting, and somehow believe that we can process millions of ballots in a single day. Doing away with our vote-by-mail system, which continues to serve as a model for the nation, would quickly lead to long lines and voter suppression – exactly what cannot happen here. Our state has a duty to ensure equitable access to the ballot box for all Washingtonians, especially among communities of color who have faced historical barriers to voting rights. A February report published by Washington State Auditor Pat

McCarthy identified mixed results based on a statistical analysis of mail-in ballots cast in the 2020 General Election. While the overall ballot-rejection rate is extremely low, certain voter groups are likely to have significantly higher rates of rejection. Auditor McCarthy found no evidence of bias in any of those ballot rejection decisions; however, she is correct to state, "Disparities in rejection rates for different racial and ethnic groups are unacceptable." I could not agree more, which is why our office has formally requested the legislature fund a study, through the University of Washington, to refine and test the State Auditor's recommendations and support implementation of viable solutions to enhance and expand voter outreach, education, and participation. In addition to requesting the study, my office is immediately taking steps to provide timely election resources and information using a host of engagement tools. Data on our underserved communities will inform our outreach plans to increase eligible voter participation, including groups with higher ballot-rejection rates.

**6. Given the pressure, harassment, and threats experienced by Secretaries of State and election workers across the United States from extremist factions, how will you support and protect your own staff, and election workers and officials at every level?**

Given the events which took place during the January 6th insurrection on our nation's capital, it is evident that extremist factions are willing to bring violence toward public servants at all levels of government. The safety of our election workers, who often find themselves in situations with individuals sympathetic to dangerous rhetoric, remains a top priority of our office. As one of the offices located in the state capital building, we regularly welcome visitors from around the country and around the world. While our exposure to the public serves as an educational opportunity, we also remain vigilant to the security threats posed to all staff: from entry-level staffers managing our front desk to director-level positions located elsewhere in the building. During our weekly meetings with all staffers, personnel security and proper procedures are reiterated and emphasized to proactively monitor the numerous threats our office faces in these uncertain times. Specifically, front office staff are equipped with emergency response buttons as well as provided with emergency contact information in the case unstable individuals enter our office. Staff are also instructed to close our automatic locking doors during threatening situations. The safety and security of my staff in this office are crucial to maintaining the exceptional work environment needed to accomplish our highest priorities.

**7. False narratives about elections being untrustworthy have been fostered by disinformation and conspiracy theories about election fraud, especially about the 2020 Presidential and swing state elections but also about elections everywhere. How will you reassure voters that our elections are secure? How do you propose to effectively prevent or counter false messages:**

**A. on social media?**

**B. from political candidates themselves?**

**C. from officials (hired, appointed, or elected) who are not candidates?**

The spreading of disinformation concerning our elections has produced dangerous rhetoric, which is only amplified by the rise and ease of access to social media in recent years. Most of us know someone by now, maybe it's a family member or friend, who has reposted or shared false content on social media. When these false messages are circulated quickly, they can potentially lead to violence such as the attack on our democracy during the January 6th insurrection. Our office has an obligation to educate

Washingtonians on how our elections process works, but we also must be vigilant about falsehoods which threaten the safety of election workers and public servants. Earlier this year, our office recommended legislation to regulate the use of deep fakes used in campaign races. Unregulated deep fakes pose significant threats to our elections process given their appearance of legitimacy and credibility to ordinary viewers. In addition to requesting legislation, a priority of our office is to work closely with local law enforcement to quickly address security threats against our elections systems derived from the spreading of false content online.

**8. How will you seek to assure that election officials themselves will not be able to take actions that jeopardize the safety and security of the elections under their administration (as happened elsewhere)?**

The most recent and egregious example of an elected county auditor promoting falsehoods about the 2020 election, and even allegedly tampering with voting equipment occurred in Colorado. Unfortunately, while that is incredibly egregious, it is not a solitary example.

Washington state law requires all voting systems to be certified, a process overseen by our county auditors. Maintaining communication with the election administrators in the state's 39 counties is critical to that collective effort.

**9. With regard to any voting machines still used in WA State:**

**A. Will you require that all voting machines have a handmarked paper ballot backup (or other verified paper backup for people with disabilities)?** Yes.

**B. Will you replace any proprietary voting machines with machines using open source software which is available for inspection and verification?**

Washington state votes by mail with verifiable paper audit trails.

**10. Even if 1630 passes, how will you assure the public that armed people will not intimidate voters at voter registration, ballot boxes, election sites, etc.?**

House Bill 1630 passed the legislature earlier this month on March 5th. Pending Governor Inslee's signature, carrying and possession of firearms and other specified weapons in certain election offices and facilities is prohibited. Restricted locations are ballot counting centers, voting centers, student engagement hubs, and voter registration offices. In order to assure the public of these changes, our office supports continuous dialog with our county auditors across the state to ensure voting centers remain in compliance with the law. Elections officials must post signs providing notice of these restrictions at each applicable location. My office will stress to our local partners that these signs must be clear and noticeable for all members of the public to understand. Violators of House Bill 1630 face a misdemeanor as a first offense, and a gross misdemeanor for second and subsequent offenses.

**11. Should the US Postal Service further deteriorate, what actions can the SOS take to assure that voters are not disenfranchised by delayed postal delivery?**

A key responsibility of this office is providing the educational resources to voters so they can make the best voting decisions. One way to address concerns of delayed postal delivery is to expand education and outreach efforts to inform voters of local ballot drop boxes, which have increased in popularity in