



## **OFFICE OF THE COCONINO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

### **SPECIAL SESSION MINUTES**

**Wednesday, April 26, 2023, 9:00 AM**

#### **In-person**

**Coconino County Administration Building, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Board Chamber Room  
219 E. Cherry Ave., Flagstaff, AZ 86001**

**Present:** Chair Patrice Horstman, Vice Chair Jeronimo Vasquez, Supervisor Lena Fowler and Supervisor Judy Begay and Supervisor Matt Ryan were present in person.

**Also Present:** Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes, Deputy County Attorney Heather Mosher, Deputy County Manager Sue Brown, County Manager Steve Peru, Communications Manager Stephen Pelligrini, Deputy County Manager Andy Bertelsen, Government Affairs Analyst Keith Brekhus, Assistant County Manager/Elections Director Eslir Musta, District 3 Director Jennifer Hammond, Interim District 2 Director Schante Patton, Election Board Worker Denise Anderson, Elections Warehouse Worker Todd Hare, Arizona Elections Director Colleen Conner, Paul Smith-Leonard Director of Communications for Arizona Secretary of State, Alex Vincent Administrative Assistant to Arizona Secretary of State and Clerk of the Board of Supervisors Lindsay Daley were all there in person.

#### **Call to Order:**

Chair Horstman called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Everyone in the room introduced themselves.

#### **Discussion Item:**

1. Meet and greet with Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes and the Board of Supervisors. Board members will present a brief summary of current events impacting County Elections, which may include but not be limited to the following topics: Voting Rights, Election Procedures Manual, challenges and opportunities with election processes; and Secretary of State Adrian Fontes may also provide comments regarding the Secretary of State's Office.

Secretary of State Adrian Fontes thanked County employees for being there. He spoke about his staff in his administration and their experience. He explained that they have assembled a great team to fulfill the role as a servant leader of elections in Arizona. He stated they know county operations and understand having to train poll-workers. He explained that the trainings his office provides has some classroom portion to it but will also have internet resources online and courses to take at leisure. Secretary of State Fontes explained that their office also has a business services division as well as a library and archives division dedicated to preserving Arizona's history. He spoke about moving the business services processes to the speed of actual business. He spoke about how his office has launched a campaign to help them with their department's budget and are hoping to be able to hire a Chief Information Officer (CIO) for information security and plan to bring in trainers to help counties with their trainings for elections. He stated that his office is looking at what they can do for counties and explained how he and his staff have been all over the state and are excited about the reception they have received and in building partnerships.

Chair Horstman explained that Coconino County has a proud history of voter turnout and has one of the top voter turnout numbers in Arizona, as the County has a community that understands what is going on in the state and county. She explained that voters expect an open and transparent election process and that the Board is proud that the County can offer the community an open, honest, and transparent election process. Chair Horstman also explained that there was a big change in Coconino County with elections with County Recorder Patty Hansen deciding to give the elections responsibility back to the Board of Supervisors in May 2020, as the Board is statutorily responsible for elections, after the Recorder's Office had taken on that responsibility for the Board for decades prior. Chair Horstman explained that it took a lot of effort, dedication, and resources to set up an Elections Office under the Board, which is now officially under the County Manager's Office and how Esler Musta took on the role of Elections Director. Chair Horstman also spoke about how Coconino County had no major problems or complications during the election and that after the election the political parties praised Coconino County for how the elections were run. Chair Horstman explained that the Board and county are concerned about the misinformation that is spread to the public about elections as well as the threats of violence to election workers and staff and how one of the goals of the Elections Office is combating misinformation and providing good training for election workers. Chair Horstman stated that Coconino County has an active Sheriff's Office that works with them to ensure election workers are safe and how they want to ensure voters that their vote matters and are accurately maintained.

Vice Chair Jeronimo Vasquez spoke about Coconino County having the sixth highest voter participation rate in the in the state. He also explained that 76% of voters in Coconino County cast an early ballot and that it is important to maintain early voting and voting by mail as option for voters, especially for minorities and lower socio-economic citizens, so that they are not disenfranchised. Vice Chair Vasquez also spoke about the need to invest in educational campaigns to help voters understand their options and the need to do that outreach in minority languages and rural areas to improve voter education and participation. He stated that he looks forward to working with Secretary of State Fontes to strengthen elections.

Supervisor Matt Ryan spoke about Secretary of State Fontes' work for Maricopa County and how Mr. Fontes took most of the heat during the last election and how he really appreciated Secretary of State Fontes standing up to keep the election strong and thanked Mr. Fontes for that. Supervisor Ryan explained that elections has changed and that Coconino County is proud of how elections are run and how Coconino County has always had a strong relationship with the Secretary of State's Office, no matter what political party. He stated that they have to continue to work on education to counteract the distrust that the public may have and the false information spread about elections. He explained that Coconino County went through the certification of equipment and were very transparent in the election process. He noted that it will be important to work together to share information and ensure elections are fair and secure.

Supervisor Begay stated that she strongly encourages that the coordination with Secretary of State Fontes' Office continues. She spoke about ballot boxes being essential in rural native communities and how proposed legislation has tried to restrict ballots from being dropped off by family members, which would disenfranchise voters. She also spoke about funds being provided for safety protocols during COVID and the election and that she encourages such assistance continues to keep voters and poll workers safe. She also explained that Coconino County has provided ballot languages in English, Spanish, Navajo and Hopi and how and hoe better coordination is needed for Hopi language access. She thanked Mr. Fontes for meeting.

Supervisor Lena Fowler explained that she saw what Maricopa County went through during their previous election and how she admires the strength that Mr. Fontes must have had to get through the stress that the situation created and how they supported him with their energies and was happy that Mr. Fontes won the election for the Office of Secretary of State and how he can bring his knowledge to the position along with his team. She stated that the County depends on the state and look at the state legislators and what they are doing that will impact elections and hopes that Mr. Fontes can provide guidance. Supervisor Fowler spoke about working on voter registration in the 1970s and working as a poll-worker and how elections are important. She explained that Native Americans gained their right to vote in federal elections in 1948 and how there are many Native Americans who do not have birth certificates and how her office works to help people get their birth certificates to be citizens of Arizona. She explained that this is one area that needs attention as well as recognizing postal boxes as addresses, when it comes to voter registration and election. She explained that on the reservation communities there are no street addresses, and that rural addressing is not complete, so postal box recognition is really important. She also talked about radio messaging being important on tribal land as it is a good way to reach citizens. Supervisor Fowler spoke about how the tri-county meetings with the Navajo Nation have been important in relation to delivering services on the ground with tribal lands and how it has been beneficial in having consistent information sent out from the counties. She explained that the tribes come out to vote when education is done. She thanked Mr. Fontes for his service and stated that she appreciates that he came and listened to how elections can be improved.

Secretary of State Fontes thanked the Board for bringing their concerns to the table. He spoke about safety related to elections and how there is a bill that is getting some headway that will help bring election workers into confidentiality to seal their addresses, so they are not available. He also stated that he and his office are meeting with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice

on May 17 to speak directly with authorities there to understand the playing field and get information directly from the tribal government.

Supervisor Fowler explained that at the last election there were trucks parked on tribal lands that were giving stuff away to voters along with misinformation. Mr. Fontes explained that there is a need to raise the urgency to know those things are happening and he spoke about having public information campaigns, which he is requesting that the legislature gives appropriation to be able to allow the release of \$3 million in federal funds so that his office can use it to assist counties with information campaigns.

Secretary of State Fontes explained that there is an attempt by certain groups to make citizens lose faith in their fellow citizens who are volunteering to help run elections and to make them out to not be trustworthy. He explained that it is important to tell the story of the average poll-worker and election worker and humanize it. Mr. Fontes stated that he understands that with the requirements around language, that oral languages and traditions have not been contemplated in the past when setting requirements and guidelines. He explained that his office is trying to find people who can do those translations quickly and that he understands that the county election offices cannot put the information out until they get that information from the Secretary of State's Office.

Secretary Fontes also addressed Supervisor Fowler's comment regarding his strength during the difficult election year. He explained that as of this year, one out of three election workers are leaving this field of work. He explained that the notion of strength is the notion of faith – civic faith. He explained that at the end of the day we have to believe in one another and have to bring it home when it comes to elections. He also spoke about trust and that we trust a lot and have to trust because that is the nature of our society. He explained that when we lose faith in one another as citizens then it destroys the entire society. He spoke about elections being the golden thread that holds all other trust together and the need to build that trust back. He explained that the people attacking elections are also attacking personal freedoms and that democracy in our country is still new and that there needs to be a focus on the big picture when talking about elections. He further explained that the strength he has and the work he does is for his kids, neighbors and that he is lucky to do this work for the state.

Chair Horstman stated that our democracy only exists as long as the right to vote exists for everyone. She explained that the County takes this seriously and that it is important for the community to endure voter integrity. She also mentioned that Coconino County has been nationally recognized for the Native American outreach program with elections.

Secretary Fontes also spoke about some of the awards that Maricopa County received regarding elections while he worked in that office and that he was proud to stand with Coconino County.

Chair Horstman stated that Recorder Patty Hansen is not running again and that voter registration and will have challenges.

Secretary Fontes explained that the voter registration system used by counties is operated out of his office and that they are going to be making changes before the end of the year to help with address issues.

Vice Chair Fowler stated that she appreciates Secretary Fontes' leadership and directness and for defending democracy and for putting together a team for what the state needs.

Supervisor Ryan expressed his appreciation for Secretary Fontes meeting and that it was good to hear about the expertise of staff that he brought into the office.

Supervisor Begay also thanked Secretary Fontes and noted that the positions he has hired in his office are critical in putting together a team. She stated that talking with him about issues of concerns has meant a lot. She also stated that the County can try to help find assistance for the language issues.

Supervisor Fowler spoke about business services in relation to people who have a post office box because they have an address that may be a description and not a traditional address and how this is creating an issue when they apply for credit cards and for small business entrepreneurs. She also spoke about the issue creating a cash economy and how the cash economy and technology collide. She also spoke about how tribes and rural communities do not think about archiving things and how it would be great for Secretary Fontes' Office to speak to the tribes about archiving. Secretary Fontes stated he will speak to the Library and Archives division regarding her suggestion.

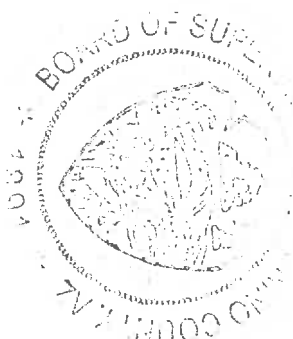
Supervisor Begay mentioned that it has been difficult for elderly, regarding the address issues and them being told to provide GPS coordinates for things but that the elderly do not know what that is. She also spoke about sending mail from Tuba City and how it has to go to Phoenix first and that creates a concern about the ballots as they worry the ballot won't make it in time.

Secretary Fontes stated he will work to get information out and that he appreciates the exchange of information and will seek assistance if needed and that he appreciates the time meeting.

Chair Horstman adjourned the meeting at 10:08 a.m.

**COCONINO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

(SEAL)



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Patrice Horstman, Chair

**ATTEST:**  
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lindsay Daley", is written over a horizontal line.

Lindsay Daley, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

