



## RICKY HATCH

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### CAN YOU DISCUSS SOME OF THE WAYS YOUR COUNTY HAS PREPARED FOR THE UPCOMING ELECTION, AND ENSURING ELECTION WORKERS AND ELECTION INTEGRITY ARE PROTECTED?

We've been preparing for this election for over a year, from evaluating potential polling places to hosting open houses for citizens, to reevaluating our ballot processing facility for efficiency and security. We have taken several measures to help protect our election workers. We have installed a camera system at each of our drop boxes as well as at the locked entrance to our county election center. We can see who is at the door from our phones/computers. We have met several times with our county Sheriff to discuss risks and security needs. This partnership has been crucial, and our Sheriff is incredibly supportive.

In October, we met with about 30 of our law enforcement partners (including city, county, and state) in a multi-county, election-specific discussion to help establish communication channels and identify some of the security issues that are unique to elections. We ran through scenarios that helped us identify the rules of engagement and the boundaries of election officials, law enforcement, and legal teams. We have increased law enforcement presence at ballot drop boxes, polling places, and our elections office. On the election integrity side, we have strengthened our ballot drop box pickup process, which involves teams who use pre-numbered security seals, photos of the sealed boxes uploaded in real time, and GPS tracking technology. We have check-in procedures and training for poll watchers, so they know what they can and cannot do.

## IS YOUR COUNTY FACING ANY CHALLENGES THIS ELECTION SEASON – SUCH AS ATTEMPTS TO UNDERMINE THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, THREATS TO ELECTION WORKERS – AND HOW IS YOUR COMMUNITY DEALING WITH THEM?

Our biggest challenge is a small but very vocal and active group of people who feel that voting by mail and the use of technology undermine the integrity of elections. Their efforts, coupled with like-minded groups from other states, has created unease among many voters. The challenge is educating the public on the actual process and existing safeguards of ballot processing, rather than exaggerated and often-untrue allegations that splash across blogs and social media. In Utah, county clerks agreed in the spring to conduct a public outreach effort on social media. We hired a media consultant group and developed educational videos to post and promote. Analytics show these posts reaching over 25% of Utah voters, and coupled with increased public tours given by county clerks, we feel that we have been able to improve voter confidence.

A poll released this month shows that 89% of Utah voters are confident that November’s election will be administered fairly and accurately, a 10% increase over the same poll that was taken earlier this year. While many factors contribute to this increase in confidence, we feel that our proactive transparency and outreach efforts have helped. Clerks meet weekly with the state elections office to discuss deadlines and best practices, and we have an “open mic” discussion that always leads to a helpful sharing of knowledge.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE FACING CHALLENGES LIKE THESE. DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR WHAT LOCAL OFFICIALS CAN DO TO COMBAT ELECTION DISINFORMATION, AND RESTORE FAITH IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS?

Election officials are good at administering elections, but not very good at PR. One of the most effective ways to combat election disinformation is to have other elected officials express confidence in the system. If you’re not familiar with how your election is being run, or if you have concerns yourself, take a tour and talk with your local election official. They are eager to share the process, related risks and safeguards with you. Once you feel good about the process, please speak up, and speak up publicly! Election officials need to be proactively transparent. Use the media to tell your story. Respond to their questions, and share your documents and ideas with them. Answer voter phone calls and emails quickly and positively. When someone challenges you, don’t assume that they want to destroy elections; assume positive intent – that they are genuinely concerned, based on the information that they have.

There are some great resources available to election administrators: [www.electionsgroup.com](http://www.electionsgroup.com), <https://safeelections.org>, <https://www.techandcivillife.org>, and <https://civicdesign.org>. These organizations provide all kinds of help to election administrators, from envelope design guides to extensive checklists to auditing standards and guides on how to cooperate with law enforcement.

## IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU’D LIKE TO ADD ON THIS TOPIC?

Election administrators naturally avoid the spotlight – we want the candidates on the front page, not us. While we certainly have our own political leanings, when we get to work, we put on our referee caps and



work with strict neutrality to ensure the election is objectively and accurately administered. I haven't yet met an elections official who is willing to risk losing their job and going to jail for any candidate. And next time you see an election official, give them a hug — or a workplace-appropriate recognition — of their tremendous efforts. Election administration has been a pressure cooker for more than two years, and they're frazzled. They could use some love, support, appreciation, and encouragement!

