

State Room Arizona 010: Rep. Alex Kolodin | The Future of Election Integrity in Arizona

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Full Article-Style Transcript

Introduction and the FAST Act

Scot Mussi: Hi, welcome to The State Room, a podcast dedicated to covering the key issues and events that will define the future of Arizona. I'm your host, Scot Mussi. Today on our program, we're going to be talking about an issue that has both energized and infuriated conservatives here in Arizona for years: election integrity.

Scot Mussi: Voters in Arizona deserve an election system that is safe, secure, and delivers timely election results. It should not be too much to ask that voters know who won an election on election night, that we have strong voter ID requirements, or that we keep foreign dollars out of our elections. The good news is that this November, there is going to be a measure on the ballot that addresses many of these issues.

Scot Mussi: Joining us today in The State Room is Alex Kolodin. Alex is a representative from Legislative District 3, an election-integrity attorney, a small-business owner, and now a candidate for Secretary of State. Alex, thank you for joining us today here in The State Room.

Alex Kolodin: Thanks for having me, Scot.

Scot Mussi: How are things going out there? You're on the campaign trail and pretty active.

Alex Kolodin: People around this state are fired up, and they are ready to bring the golden age home. We have seen for the past four years the catastrophe that having a Democratic executive branch has brought to Arizona. We went from first in the country in job creation to forty-seventh. We went from being a state with a stable water supply to having our clock cleaned in the Colorado River negotiations and looking at a very serious cutback next year in the water our cities and suburbs use.

Alex Kolodin: That has all been brought about by the Hobbs-Fontes administration, which has been an incompetent catastrophe. People are seeing this, and they are ready to restore a competent Republican executive branch that is going to get it done for the people.

Alex Kolodin's Background in Election Law

Scot Mussi: Before we dive into the FAST Act, the ballot referral that will be on the ballot in November, when did you first get so involved in election-integrity issues here in Arizona?

Alex Kolodin: I got involved when I was a baby attorney. I had just hung out a shingle and thought I was going to be a real-estate lawyer or whatever. But there was a bipartisan group of people out of Santa Cruz County that was concerned about the way elections were being run there. They submitted a very unusual public-records request for metadata from the county's central tabulator computer, and of course the county would not give it to them.

Alex Kolodin: They looked around the state for a lawyer willing to take it on. The only guy they could find was me. So eight months out of law school, I was in trial against the Secretary of State's Office.

Scot Mussi: Baptism by fire in Santa Cruz County.

Alex Kolodin: Baptism by fire. But we won the case, and my clients discovered that Santa Cruz County was printing early-voting results before Election Day, which is a big no. I started developing a reputation in the field. It was a small field back then, so there were not many of us doing it. I kept getting the cases, and now I have been practicing election law for almost fifteen years.

Alex Kolodin: Eventually, I reflected on the cases I was doing and thought that the reason our elections are so screwed up is that the Legislature does not know what it is doing. Election law is complicated and technically complex. When people who do not understand it are making those laws, the system is naturally going to get screwed up. That is why I wanted to go into the Legislature and do a better job myself, which I believe I have accomplished despite a very challenging divided-government situation.

What the FAST Act Would Do

Scot Mussi: Since you have been at the Legislature working on these election-integrity issues, the culmination this past year was the FAST Act. You helped lead the charge to get it referred to the ballot in November. What is in the FAST Act, and what will it do if voters approve it?

Alex Kolodin: The FAST Act has the items that Arizonans around the state have been asking for for years. It has common-sense rules, such as requiring government-issued identification for every ballot cast. More than eighty percent of Arizonans tell us they want that. It includes a ban on foreign contributions to Arizona elections and constitutionalizes our state's common-sense requirement that you have to be a citizen in order to vote.

Alex Kolodin: Adrian Fontes is in front of the United States Supreme Court right now trying to eliminate parts of that requirement because he wants to make it easier for noncitizens to vote. That is why he allowed people to register to vote in federal races using a Social Security number, even though you do not have to be a citizen to have one.

Alex Kolodin: This is way too radical for Arizona. This entire leftward shift of the Democratic Party toward the Zohran Mamdani party, of which Mr. Fontes is a leading part, is out of step with mainstream Arizona voters and the way they want elections run. They know our elections have become a catastrophe since Fontes first took an elections-administration position and ran his first election in 2018. It is time for voters to reform the system themselves because Mr. Fontes is not going to do it, and then to put a competent administrator in office who will effectively administer the laws voters pass.

Scot Mussi: It is amazing that some of the provisions you mentioned have not been able to get through and be signed by Governor Hobbs because they seem like common sense to most voters. You mentioned voter ID and no foreign funding, which is a real issue. We did a major review last year of money entering Arizona's political system and found a foreign-born billionaire pouring money through nonprofits that engage in our elections. These are real issues, not theoretical ones.

Scot Mussi: Has the left and the Democrats at the Capitol simply opposed every kind of common-sense election reform every step of the way?

Alex Kolodin: Every step of the way. My first year in office, when I realized we were going to be in divided government, I had to think hard about what Democrats should be able to support. I had run on common-sense election reform, and I researched for months until I came up with something I thought Katie Hobbs would surely sign.

Alex Kolodin: At the time, Arizona did not have legally binding rules for verifying early-voter signatures. It was an arbitrary process that risked both impairing election security and disenfranchising legitimate voters. You need clear rules. That is very important for due process.

Alex Kolodin: Katie Hobbs had written a set of rules in the summer of 2020 when she was Secretary of State. I thought she would at least sign a bill codifying her own rules, because some

rules, even bad rules, are better than no rules. I sent her a one-line bill that essentially said the Secretary of State's summer 2020 signature-verification guide would govern how verification was performed. After three days, she vetoed it.

Alex Kolodin: I finally got rules a year later, but I had to find leverage to twist her arm. If Democrats will veto their own rules, then there is no way to reach common ground and reform our elections for the good of all Arizonans.

Passing the FAST Act Through the Legislature

Scot Mussi: It seems that whenever Republicans support something, even if Democrats previously advocated for it, Democrats at the state Capitol decide it is the worst thing in the world and oppose it.

Alex Kolodin: I have never seen House Democrats more panicked than when the FAST Act went up on the board for the final time. They did not believe we would get it done. They thought we would be like Washington Republicans: all talk and no action. But here in Arizona, Republicans delivered.

Alex Kolodin: I want voters to know that because many voters become dispirited and ask why they should vote when Republicans talk a good game but never deliver. That may be true in Washington, but it is not true here in Arizona. I have been fighting for voters for four years, and my Republican colleagues in the House have been fighting for them as well. We have had a backbone and acted the way voters told us they wanted Republicans to act.

Alex Kolodin: After two years of persistence, I passed the FAST Act and put it on the ballot so voters can choose. Voting matters because Arizona Republicans do what we tell voters we are going to do. When voters turn out, they keep those good things going.

Scot Mussi: One thing that impressed me during the development of the FAST Act was that it was collaborative. Nobody was excluded. People from the House and Senate could participate and present their own ideas so the best product could be put together. Everybody wanted to solve the problems, but people had different ideas. Were you surprised you were able to bring Republicans together around these reforms?

Alex Kolodin: I was pleasantly surprised. I had been trying for two years, and it had been killed over and over again, sometimes in good faith and more often, in my opinion, in bad faith. There are people who want problems to continue. Sometimes at the Capitol you hear, 'If we solve that problem, then we cannot keep talking about it.' I stare at people when they say that because Arizona has enough problems to spend the rest of our lives solving them without making a dent. Why not get started?

Alex Kolodin: When a ballot referral goes on the board, it is often a foregone conclusion. This one was not. I was negotiating with the last holdout in the middle of my floor speech. She came over to ask me a question, and I had to stop and negotiate because it was that important to my constituents to get it done and give voters the choice.

Alex Kolodin: People are frustrated because they vote for Republicans to deliver common-sense election security, but then do not get it. They are just asked for money so it can be done next time. I was sick and tired and embarrassed that we had not delivered, so I put in the enormous amount of effort required. At the end of the day, we got it done.

Alex Kolodin: The Arizona Free Enterprise Club was an enormous help. Your expertise, your ability to help us whip votes, and your messaging to the public were invaluable in getting this reform onto voters' ballots. We know it is widely popular, and voters will prove it in November.

Faster Election Results Without Removing Voting Options

Alex Kolodin: There is also a component that speeds up election results. We heard loud and clear from voters that they wanted faster results, but they did not want to lose any options in how they voted. We realized we could give voters faster results by improving the back end of the process that voters do not see.

Alex Kolodin: A few election officials howled about that because it creates more work for them. But voters told us they wanted more work for election officials, not more work for themselves. At the end of the day, I work for the voters. That is what they wanted, and that is what will be on the ballot.

Scot Mussi: The voter-ID and foreign-funding provisions are important, but so is making sure we get election results on election night. That is a bipartisan issue. Average voters do not understand why it takes weeks to get results. Arizona has become a national punchline because we cannot figure out who won our elections. That destroys faith in the process and creates suspicion.

Scot Mussi: The measure allows people who bring in early ballots to have those ballots tabulated on site, as many other states allow. They can know their ballot was counted accurately. That is one of the best provisions because it speeds up results and gives voters another convenience option they do not currently have.

Scot Mussi: It was frustrating to see pushback from election officials. Some simply do not like change or the additional steps it creates for them. But the priority should be voters, making the system easy to use and giving them faster results.

Alex Kolodin: I do want to recognize several election officials who understood the importance of restoring trust and confidence in the system. Elections exist so everyone feels their voice has been freely and fairly represented according to law. Maricopa County Recorder Justin Heap, Yuma County Recorder David Lara, and Navajo County Recorder David Marshall all went to bat to help us get this through, despite opposition from more liberal election officials, including the Pima County Recorder.

Alex Kolodin: There are good people working at high levels in our election offices, and there are more of them than there used to be. We can continue that by electing a Secretary of State who is competent, follows the law, and protects every voter regardless of party.

The Competing Election Measure

Scot Mussi: Adrian Fontes helped spearhead opposition from the left. For several months, they were pushing their own citizens' initiative and their own version of what they believed would improve the election system. The good news this week was that they are not turning in signatures and will not try to qualify it for the ballot. What did they want to do, and why would it have been a catastrophe?

Alex Kolodin: It is important to talk about who 'they' are. The person behind the left's failed ballot measure is Adrian Fontes. He used taxpayer-funded official accounts to promote his measure and advocate for the defeat of ours. Up until Fontes, not even Katie Hobbs regularly weighed in as Secretary of State on proposed ballot measures because the precedent was that the chief election official should not appear to put a thumb on the scale.

Scot Mussi: Along comes Adrian Fontes, and he weighs in on almost every issue and proactively campaigns for them.

Alex Kolodin: Exactly. He was campaigning for this radical measure because he wants California-style elections here. The Department of Justice said California suffered a failed election because it did not have universal government-issued ID for every ballot cast. We do not have that either. The FAST Act would prevent a California-style catastrophe in Arizona.

Alex Kolodin: Fontes's measure would essentially have given allied organizations broad power to go into court and strike down election-security laws they did not like. It would have been lawless and

chaotic. I am glad voters rejected the measure by refusing to sign it, just as I believe they will reject him in November.

Scot Mussi: One provision would have permanently locked our current tabulation process into the Constitution, meaning we could never change the system to speed up results. We could have been waiting until Christmas to know who won some races. Thankfully, voters saw through it, did not sign it, and it was dropped.

Alex Kolodin: I liked the statement they put out when it failed. They said they had enough signatures, but definitely not enough valid signatures. Who were they getting to sign it? That is exactly why we need the FAST Act: to make sure only lawful votes are cast.

Alex Kolodin: Under federal law, Adrian Fontes is supposed to oversee voter-roll maintenance. He has ultimate responsibility for it, but he has not been doing it. He told Citizen AG that he had no records showing compliance with federal law. Instead of ensuring only lawfully registered people participate, he has tried to give anyone broad access to vote whether or not they are a citizen or live in Arizona. That is too radical for the state.

Why Alex Kolodin Is Running for Secretary of State

Scot Mussi: You could have stayed in the Legislature, but last year you decided to run for Secretary of State. What was the inflection point that made you decide to do it?

Alex Kolodin: Being in the Legislature impressed upon me that you can write the best law in the world, but if you do not have a competent election administrator who follows it, it does not matter. That has been frustrating because I have managed to leverage Katie Hobbs into signing some good bills. When good people such as Justin Heap administer them, they work very well. The signature-verification rules I established as a minimum standard are one example. He has now built a robust process around them.

Alex Kolodin: If everybody were a Justin Heap, I would stay in the Legislature forever. But that is not the case. Adrian Fontes has been twisting and distorting the law to the point where passing new laws is not as effective as it should be.

Alex Kolodin: Fontes has been a *bête noire* of mine for six years. I had to take him to the Arizona Supreme Court when he tried to seize the power to decide how a voter intended to vote. We beat him there. I had to take him to court again when he tried to ban protests in city centers on Election Day and criminalize criticism of election officials. We prevailed against him before an all-Democratic panel on the Ninth Circuit, which was no easy feat.

Alex Kolodin: It became a full-time job cleaning up after his messes. I decided that if I were Secretary of State, I could do that job full time and would not have to spend forty hours a week dealing with Fontes. It reached the point where I said no more. It is time for him to go and for us to restore elections that everybody in Arizona can be proud of.

Scot Mussi: We have found ourselves in the same position. Over the past couple years, we have had to sue him over actions he took in office, and we prevailed in free-speech and First Amendment cases. From our perspective, he has been a disaster for public participation and confidence in the election system.

Vote by Text and Other Future Risks

Scot Mussi: If he serves another four years, what do you think would be the biggest threat? What has he gotten wrong, and what could he make even worse?

Alex Kolodin: He is pushing, along with other Democratic secretaries of state, for a vote-by-text system. You would text your vote from your phone. That is incredibly easy to hack, trivial to compromise, and extremely difficult to secure.

Scot Mussi: He wants to make voting like American Idol. You just go in, vote, and trust the system.

Alex Kolodin: Exactly. There would be no transparency, no chain of custody, and third-party vendors could see how you voted, so there would be no privacy. That is what he wants because he wants to turn Arizona's elections into California's system and ultimately transform the state according to his own far-left vision.

Alex Kolodin: He does not share many of the values Arizonans hold, including the free-enterprise system and constitutional rights for every citizen. He believes he knows best and wants to be in a position to transform the state. That is why we have to stop him now.

Alex Kolodin: The good news is that he has never been successfully reelected. He served one term as Maricopa County Recorder and was voted out after flagrantly disregarding the law. The Attorney General's Office had to take him to court after he tried to print roughly 300,000 ballots he had no legal authority to print and mail ballots to every voter in Maricopa County.

Scot Mussi: Mark Brnovich and others had to intervene before he did it.

Alex Kolodin: That is right, and they did great work. But you cannot catch every single thing. The conservative legal movement has limited resources, and eventually something will get through. He has already taken actions that made the system worse. As long as he remains in office, he threatens every Arizonan's confidence in elections and every Arizonan's civil rights, regardless of party.

Voter-Roll Maintenance as a Day-One Priority

Scot Mussi: If you are elected and enter the Secretary of State's Office, what is your top issue on day one?

Alex Kolodin: Clean up the voter rolls. I have been involved in the election-integrity movement for a long time, and people express concerns about mail voting, machines, and other parts of the system. When you look at the root of those concerns, what they are really concerned about, even if they do not always know it, is the voter rolls.

Alex Kolodin: If only lawful registrants are on the voter rolls, it becomes much harder to manipulate the mechanism of voting or mail ballots. Every ballot is attached to somebody legally entitled to vote. Cleaning up the voter rolls would restore confidence in every part of Arizona's election system, including the vote-by-mail process that Arizonans overwhelmingly use.

Alex Kolodin: Maricopa County Recorder Justin Heap is the first really good, honest, smart, and competent person we have had in that office in quite a while. In his first year and change in office, he has already identified and removed about half a million names from the voter list that should not have been there. That is approximately twenty percent of the names that were on Maricopa County's voter rolls. It is hard to have confidence in any part of the system until that work happens. Cleaning up the voter rolls is the day-one priority.

Scot Mussi: I am glad that is one of your priorities. A couple years ago, we sent a letter and eventually filed a lawsuit after identifying counties that appeared to have more registered voters on their rolls than Census data indicated were eligible to register. It was clear active and inactive voters remained listed when they should have been removed under the law.

Scot Mussi: Adrian Fontes fought that request tooth and nail and opposed us in court. He has shown no interest in making sure only eligible voters remain on the rolls.

Lightning Round

Scot Mussi: Let's do some lightning-round questions with one- or two-sentence answers. Why does the Secretary of State's race matter in 2026? Why should voters care and make the right choice?

Alex Kolodin: I understand elections administration is not the thing that gets every Arizonan's pulse pounding, but everyone cares about something touched by the President, Congress, the Legislature, or the Governor. The Secretary of State is not just Arizona's chief elections officer. The office is arguably the most important elections office in the world because the road to the White House and the congressional majority runs directly through it.

Alex Kolodin: Without a competent Secretary of State dedicated to following the law, voters cannot have confidence in elections for President, Congress, the Legislature, or Governor. Over time, that degrades our sense of fellowship as Americans, makes people cynical, and causes them to drop out of participation. That is not healthy for the long-term success of a democracy and a republic.

Alex Kolodin: My pitch is that Secretary of State is the most important race on any ballot this cycle. I encourage viewers to get involved because we need all the help we can get. Foreign billionaires are putting money into our elections, and some of it makes its way to Mr. Fontes. He raises a great deal of out-of-state money. All I have are Arizona voters who are ready for change. People can learn more at alex4az.com.

Scot Mussi: What is the biggest myth pushed by people who say the current system is safe, secure, and reliable and does not need changes?

Alex Kolodin: You just said the biggest myth. The question answered itself.

Alex Kolodin: Our current system is not safe, secure, and reliable, unfortunately. In 2022, voters in the Attorney General's race were turned away at polling places, and judges refused to order their votes counted because of a back-end MVD-system glitch connected to the Hobbs-Fontes administration. That glitch is still there. I still get calls from voters asking why their registration is inactive or why they are receiving notices.

Alex Kolodin: They have refused to fix it and have gone to court against efforts to remove invalid registrants and ensure only lawful Arizona citizens are on the rolls. That is unacceptable. It is not a system I want to hand down to my children or for them to hand down to theirs.

Alex Kolodin: When I was growing up, we were proud on Election Day and proud that Arizona's system worked well. Over time, that changed. The eyes of the nation are now upon us, and Arizona must operate at the level of importance it has reached. Adrian Fontes is not capable of doing that. The state needs a great elections administrator.

Scot Mussi: Most important race on the ballot outside your own?

Alex Kolodin: Governor. Absolutely. My job will become much easier if Andy Biggs is Governor. He is somebody I have admired for a long time and have a strong working relationship with. I respect that Secretary of State is not a policymaking position. It is essentially a law-enforcement and administration position. The Legislature makes the laws, and we ensure they are properly executed. When legal changes are needed to improve the voter experience, I know Andy Biggs is somebody I could work with collaboratively.

Scot Mussi: Will you debate Adrian Fontes?

Alex Kolodin: I have already debated Adrian Fontes twice. The first time, he left in the middle of the debate and walked off the stage. The second time, he stayed until the end and then stormed off. He has never gone up against a Republican who is an expert in elections. He cannot simply make claims without being challenged because I have the receipts. Whenever he talks, I can refute him.

Alex Kolodin: I do not know whether he will debate me in the general election, but if he does, I will be excited to take that on again.

Closing: Why Vote for the FAST Act

Scot Mussi: Final pitch: why should Arizonans vote for the FAST Act in November?

Alex Kolodin: Arizonans should vote for the FAST Act because these are their elections. Voters have told us they want elections that are more secure and deliver faster results. This is my best effort to give voters what they told me they wanted.

Alex Kolodin: I wrote this for voters so they could have the choice. We have traveled around the state and asked people, and they say they need confidence and security in the system. People rightly trust themselves more than they trust the Legislature or any elected official. Voters now have the power in their hands to reform the system the way they want it.

Alex Kolodin: I humbly ask Arizonans to vote for the FAST Act because they will be proud of their elections when they do, especially when they have me to administer the new law.

Scot Mussi: Alex, thank you for joining us today.

Alex Kolodin: Thank you, Scot.

Scot Mussi: And everyone watching, thank you for joining us here in The State Room, where we cover all the key issues and events that will help keep Arizona free. Thank you.