

Candidate Questionnaire
Mesa County Coroner
Dean Havlik, M.D.(R)

By now, you have read and considered the seven political principles we feel should guide political conduct in Western Colorado.

1. Since the Mesa County Coroner is an elected official, you will be expected to conform to a set of norms defining political activity. Do you endorse each of the seven principles Restore the Balance feels should guide political conduct in Western Colorado? If you endorse them all, please explain how you will work to execute these principles. If there are one or more principles you do not endorse, please identify them and explain why.

I think the principles of Restore the Balance are smart and sound. I get frustrated when politicians can't work with one another on important matters and won't come to some type of compromise when it is needed to improve our society. It is important for Democrats to work in a respectful manner with Republicans and vice versa. As the elected Coroner, I will be understanding of other people's beliefs even if it is not a belief I share. The Coroner's Office is not a place for politics and the Office needs to have respect for ALL those that have died and their family and friends.

2. In some counties in Colorado, the Coroner, or medical examiner is an appointed position. Do you believe the County Coroner should be an elected or appointed? Why do you feel that way?

The Coroner's system is archaic and odd in a lot of ways. In the US we have "Coroner states" and "medical examiner states" in regards to how each state investigates deaths. There are only a few pure "Coroner states" and Colorado is unfortunately one of them. In Colorado, most counties elect a Coroner. There are a couple of Colorado counties in which the Coroner is appointed, most notably in Denver. The "medical examiner states", such as states that surround Colorado, including New Mexico and Utah, operate their death investigation system in the ideal manner in which there is an appointed forensic pathologist that serves as the lead of the system. A forensic pathologist is the most qualified person to lead a death investigation system since they have undergone years of medical education and it is the job they are trained to do. There are no political issues that revolve around the Coroner's Office. The Coroner should not be an elected position. The most qualified and experienced person should be appointed as the Coroner. Forensic pathologists are fairly limited in number throughout the US. In Colorado there are only about 15 board certified forensic pathologists and most of them reside on the Front Range. If there is a forensic pathologist available that resides in a Colorado county, they are almost always the perfect person to be the Coroner. However, because there are more counties than forensic pathologists in Colorado, there are some counties that instead of a forensic pathologist they would have to appoint the most qualified person based on death investigation experience and medical knowledge and this appointed person should then have available a trusted forensic pathologist consultant from another county to be an advisor to them. I currently work with a lot of really great non-forensic pathologist Coroners in Colorado so it can be

done but if there is a forensic pathologist available residing in the county, than that is the person that usually should be the Coroner.

3. In Mesa County, in order to run for Coroner, a candidate must be 18 years of age, be a U.S. citizen, lived in the county for at least one year, and have a four-year high school diploma or its equivalent or a college degree. Should the qualifications for a county coroner require a medical background? Why or why not?

The Mesa County Coroner should absolutely have some type of medical knowledge and background. Mesa County is big enough that the citizens should expect this qualification. A lot of people may think that a Coroner's Office deals mostly with violent deaths but in reality the majority of the deaths that are investigated by a Coroner's Office are natural deaths. It is important for the Coroner to understand disease processes and how they affect the human body. A forensic pathologist is the perfect medical professional to serve the role of Coroner since they have gone to medical school, served a several year residency in general pathology (the study of how disease affects the human body) and completed a fellowship program in forensic pathology which includes education on becoming an expert in how and why people die and determining cause and manner of death.

4. Why do you believe you are better qualified to serve as Coroner than your opponent?

I am a board certified forensic pathologist. I graduated from medical school, completed a 5 year general pathology residency program, underwent intense training in forensic pathology at a prestigious forensic pathology fellowship program (University of New Mexico) and completed the necessary requirements to become board certified in both general pathology and forensic pathology. I have 21 years of experience in being a forensic pathologist and was the previous Mesa County Coroner for 12 years (2007-2019) before I was term-limited. I am currently in the prime of my career at 53 years of age and I am really looking forward to serving the Mesa County community again. I have missed working with my own county and I want to provide my experience and knowledge to my fellow Mesa County citizens. I am the only active board certified forensic pathologist in Western Colorado. Being the Coroner is what I am trained to do and the reason I completed 14 years of higher education. My opponent is a lay person and it has been proven over these last four years with a lay person as Coroner that it is also cheaper to have me as the Coroner. The Coroner budget has expanded immensely since I was term-limited in January 2019 and a lot of it has to do with not having an educated and trained forensic pathologist as the Coroner.

5. Can you provide some examples of how you worked with members of the opposing party in developing your ideas or policies as an office holder or candidate?

When I was the elected Coroner from 2007-2019, there was never a time where political affiliation affected my job or how I worked with others. As Coroner, you interact closely with a number of individuals including family members and friends of the deceased, law enforcement personnel and attorneys. I treated each of these individuals the same regardless of their political ideals.

6. What changes or improvements will you bring to the office?

There are a few changes and improvements that I will bring to the Office if I am lucky enough to be elected the Mesa County Coroner. First and foremost, Mesa County will have a trained and experienced forensic pathologist leading the office as it should be. I will bring back the forensics work to be done locally and it will be completed by local Mesa County citizens. Under the current lay Coroner's tenure, the forensics work has essentially been farmed out to those outside of Mesa County. I will bring all this important work back locally. This will immensely improve a number of issues with the Coroner's Office including performance of autopsies on a daily basis instead of only a couple times a week, release of the deceased individuals to funeral homes in a timely manner instead of holding them due to delays in autopsy procedures, faster reporting of important information on deaths in the county to family members and others, ease of access to the forensic pathologist by family, attorneys and law enforcement, better turnaround time of reports and it is much cheaper to do the work locally. I believe Mesa County citizens will be happy with the quality of work along with the education and experience that I can bring back to the Mesa County Coroner's Office. Mesa County deserves to have a forensic pathologist as their Coroner and I am happy to provide that for them!