

Excerpts from blog post by Ron Gregory

August 11, 2024

One thing I know for certain: the current Democrat candidate for West Virginia Secretary of State knows more about elections than even those who have been elected to the job as the “chief state election official” over the years.

It would be difficult for anyone to compare actual election experience with Democrat Secretary of State nominee Thornton Cooper.

Any fair person who knows much about West Virginia’s election history will certainly remember Cooper as intimately involved in five decades of balloting.

When one reaches back to the 1980s for an individual involved in state elections, research will inevitably turn to Cooper, a South Charleston lawyer.

Without flamboyance, the man is a living legend in the mechanics of state voting laws. By now, there are few questions that Cooper could be asked about elections where he has not been involved in a similar question or issue years ago.

. . .

The man is particularly keen on redistricting. That’s where, every ten years, population shifts require new House of Representatives, State Legislature and other district lines to be drawn.

Populations are to be fairly equal and gerrymandering is frowned upon when redistricting occurs. It’s a tough job but Cooper has it down to a science.

He keeps up on all new election laws and regulations. Mention an old or new election rule change and Cooper can tell you its history and the effect it has on outcomes.

After the most recent population data from the 2020 Census was reported, a . . . member on the Redistricting Committee chuckled.

“We’ll spend hundreds of hours working to get this right,” he said. “I’m sure Thornton already has it figured out.”

It turns out the legislator was right. When Kanawha County . . . [Senator] Richard Lindsay and I bumped into Cooper a couple days later on the capitol breezeway, he already had the new lines mapped out in his briefcase.

Naturally, they all matched requirements of the law.

So comprehensive is Cooper’s election law knowledge that he has often challenged redistricting and other legislative election decisions in court.

The candidate smiled when asked recently about appearing before the state Supreme Court of Appeals in so many of these cases.

“Sometimes they (the Supreme Court Justices) take a look at the question, say ‘yeah, he’s right, they’re wrong, but they can do it anyway.’”

. . .

Statewide elected executive officers, such as the Secretary of State, will see their salaries go from \$95,000 to \$135,334 annually beginning in January 2025. That's thanks to the Legislature.

“Ludicrous,” Cooper said. “Where in the private sector is anybody getting that kind of increase?”

The candidate said he'd “happily” work for the \$95,000 annually without any raise.

. . .

The Governor gets an increase from the current \$150,000 to \$186,054 under the new pay scale.

Go back to the 2010 Census and you'll find yet another Cooper challenge. Then, he brought a different issue to the court's attention.

My point is that Democrats have a nominee here who has devoted hours of his legal career to working in the field most affected by the office he is seeking.

There is widespread speculation afoot that the now-dominant GOP will hold all statewide executive offices after the November balloting just as they now do. (This is known as the Board of Public Works as well).

Cooper admits his odds of winning are long. He pledges to spend \$20,000 of his own dollars. That's a drop in the bucket to what his Republican opponent, former GOP State Chair Kris Warner, spent in the primary, winning the GOP nomination.

Warner and groups supporting him will overwhelmingly outspend Cooper in the fall, as well. Clearly, Warner is the favorite.

Still, it's fascinating to have someone of Cooper's experience and capability on the ballot. Actually, it's quite unusual. This is not some political hanger-on seeking to increase his retirement check. It is, instead, someone who is fair, honest and genuinely qualified to do the job.

. . .

Stranger things have happened than the most qualified candidate winning. In this one, at least, I'd give Cooper a reasonable shot.

[excerpts from Ron Gregory's blog, with minor corrections]