Geoff Sebesta – Candidate for Secretary of State – 2019

1. What sets you apart from the other candidates?

I definitely seem to be the one having the most fun. However, I think all four of the Democratic candidates are good, and I still have high hopes that the Libertarians will produce a SoS candidate for the general election. The Republican candidates all seem like nice people, and they're very sincere, but all their proposals to end with fewer people voting.  We want more people to be able to vote.

I am also the only candidate who is willing to admit the other candidates exist.  Why are politicians like that?  There's this superstitious belief that if we don't say the names of the other candidates, those candidates will somehow cease to exist.  I think that's silly.  We're all going to be on the same ballot.  I know the other candidates, like them tremendously, and greatly look forward to working with *all* of them (with two exceptions, both on the Republican side) after the election is over.  They all have their strengths!  Jason Belcher has, by far, the best grasp of the IT and security issues.  Jason Griffith, in addition to being a truly fearsome grassroots organizer, has perhaps the clearest vision of all of us of the political realities of the office.  I'm also moved by his wonderful relationship with his son; that speaks volumes to me about his character.   Heather French Henry, in addition to being far and away the best known of all of us (and this is a massive advantage in a race that, to be blunt, the Democrats really need to win in November), has a sincere devotion to public service that can't be denied and that shows in literally every aspect of her life.

That's why I'm going to hire them all.

1. How are you going to bring Kentucky into the future?

Daily!  :)

The office of the Secretary of State, despite recent controversies, is a fully functioning and professional office.  The problems in the news right now are not the problems of a failing office; everybody still gets to vote, everybody still gets to register their corporations, we can still track our own legislation.

So I do not walk into the office with a intention to "modernize," though I believe that will happen naturally.  Although I love the idea of advancing our voting systems (and I certainly intend to start a state-wide conversation about voting system reform), simply securing the grants to pay for the county clerk's offices to modernize their voting machines will be enough at first.  Recruiting a new generation of poll workers will be enough.  Holding free clinics on incorporation practices and the Kentucky Constitution at various high schools and continuing education centers will be enough...and really, is there anything that brings "Kentucky" into the future more profoundly than teaching our Kentucky Constitution to schoolchildren?  What is Kentucky if it is not our Constitution?

Finally, my transparency provisions (which I will outline in the next question) will probably turn out to be far more important than we think they will be.  That's definitely going to bring us into the future in one way or another, though no one could predict how right now.  That's the thing about information; you don't know what you're going to do until you get it.  My term in office will result in the generation of a whole lot of information.  We don't know what we're going to do with it yet.  We will know our government, and ourselves, better than ever before.  Who knows what will happen with information like that?  Maybe there's some big problem that we haven't discovered yet.  Or, maybe, we'll take this long hard look at ourselves, and we'll decide that maybe things aren't so bad after all, and that deep down we all really like each other.  Who knows.  Whatever happens, we will all be doing it together.

1. What are your goals if elected?

I'm already accomplishing a surprising number of my goals in during the race!  For example, I wanted people to talk about returning the right to vote to felons -- it turns out that running for Secretary of State and mentioning it first in literally every speech is a good way to get more people to talk about it!  I feel like we're really talking about it now!

So, stuff like that, I'm gonna keep doing that.

When I'm elected, the first thing I'm gonna do is open an internet mirror of my official email account, and I'm going to ask my staff to scan every memo and every bit of mail the office gets and put it all online, immediately.  I will maintain complete real-time transparency for my term of office, at all times.  I will release literally every bit of information that passes through the office and provide weekly video updates and summaries for the convenience of all.  I will refuse all privileged correspondence.  I will refuse all secret correspondence.  The government belongs to the people, and this means that the government and the people have to start being honest with each other.  No more secrets.

And then I'm gonna go talk to the governor about doing the same thing for his office.  Here's what the Kentucky Constitution says about that:

"The Secretary of State shall keep a fair register of and attest all the official acts of the Governor, and shall, when required, lay the same and all papers, minutes and vouchers relative thereto before either House of the General Assembly. "

--Kentucky Constitution, Section 91.

"All official acts" means all the acts in the office!  "Fair register" means you can read it!  Kentucky Constitution says you get to read it because I get to publish it, and that's what I'm gonna do.  If I have a governor who cooperates, we'll have the most transparent state government in US history, and that's no exaggeration.  If I'm working with an unethical governor who refuses to cooperate, then I'm going to fight them.  Every day, every step of the way.  I will be the best friend the Open Records Act ever had.

The Kentucky government will finally be known by its proprietors, the citizens of the Commonwealth; **us**.

After we get the ball rolling on that (first day!) I'm gonna take a tour around the state and meet with as many county clerks as I possibly can.  It's 120 counties, so that will probably take a while, but I'd like to get that done within my first year.

I do not intend to interfere with their offices or seek to gain power over them.  I'm not gaining power over anybody.  I'm a secretary.  I'm going to find out what they have to say and to write it down.  That's what secretaries do.  I will rebuild the relationship with the State Board of Elections, simply by respecting them, talking to them, facilitating for them and not trying to gain power over them.  I will treat my position with humility and decorum.  I see this as a job for a citizen-elected reporter and secretary, and the secretary is *never* supposed to be the most important person in any meeting.

I'll run the office of Secretary of State, and I'll run it well.  But it's not really about me.

1. How do you plan on addressing income inequality in Kentucky?

That's really not in the Secretary of State's wheelhouse in any way, but there are three specific things I can do.

1.  Returning the right to vote to felons, especially when so many of them lost their right to vote because of economic crimes and War on Drugs fallout, returns power to the poor in a profound way.  More importantly, it returns a feeling of civic engagement to a segment of the population that feels abandoned and left behind.  A vote is more than a decision.  It's a way of making people feel involved, of making them feel important, of letting them know that their opinion matters to the rest of us.  It lets them know that, even if they didn't get what they want, somebody heard them.  Finally, a vote lets everyone know that if they're smart, and wise, and patient, they can get what they want; their turn will come.  That's so important.  It's so important to let people feel that way about their own government.

2.  I will run clinics and actively help people to file incorporations and 501c(3) paperwork.  This will let poor people participate in modern business.  It's impossible to be part of almost any of the modern forms of capital acquisition without incorporating in some way or another.  Practically speaking; you can't start a business, you can't get a grant, you can't even invest in real estate without at least an LLC, because if you don't have one, nobody will even talk to you and one mistake can cost you everythingeverything.  Making it easier for people to incorporate will do a lot to help poor people come up in the world.

3.  If funding can be found (and I am very much against expanding the budget of the Secretary of State's office for any reason other than dire necessity), I'd like to have a paid professional representative of the Secretary of State's office in each county to act as a citizen reporter and facilitator of difficult paperwork.  Don't get me wrong, this is a lot of money we're talking about -- I'm essentially talking about hiring 120 more librarians statewide, and I'd give them their own offices if I could; I'd rent a small storefront in downtown of the county seat of every county.  But this money goes *directly* to small-town Kentuckians and downtowns, so it makes a good investment.

Finally, as I've mentioned on many occasions, I am categorically against the humiliation of the poor, and I will show respect, at every opportunity, to all Kentuckians.  To me, allowing somebody to vote is one of the deepest forms of respect possible.