

# Morgan looks to unseat Kobach for secretary of state

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Scott Morgan wants the office of secretary of state to return to a “tradition of quiet competence,” almost a “non-partisan” role. He says that’s a far cry from what it has become under current Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach.

To Morgan, Kobach has made the office much more visible than it needs to be and, worse yet, has damaged the most important part of a functioning representative republic: voting.

Morgan, a republican and a former staffer for senators Bob Dole and Nancy Kassebaum in the late 1980s and early 90s, will face Kobach in the primary.

During a visit to The Mercury Friday afternoon, he said he decided to get back into politics because he’s worried about the image Kobach has created for the state.

Kobach — also a Republican — has made national headlines

for his voter ID policies, which require identification to vote and a birth certificate or passport to register.

Morgan, who lives in Lawrence with his wife, Kathleen O’Leary Morgan and their three children, said he experienced the frustration of Kobach’s policies when his daughter, Grace, tried to register to vote online through the state’s website last month.

Even though she uploaded all the necessary information, Morgan said his daughter received a letter in mail that her registration had been put on hold. Kobach’s office later told news outlets that it takes a few days for his office to receive uploaded images, and that the letter was mailed before the picture of her passport had been processed.

At the time, Morgan’s daughter joined more than 18,000 other Kansans who were put on temporary holds for their registration.

The matter was resolved, and Morgan’s daughter was



Staff photo by Uno Yi

Scott Morgan, candidate for secretary of state, speaks at the Mercury offices on Friday. He will face incumbent Kris Kobach in the primary.

approved, but Morgan said he believes the incident proved that Kobach’s tampering with voting procedures has created more problems than it has solved.

“It’s a very clunky system,” he said. “Even if it’s just incompetence, that’s reprehensible. We

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need to be encouraging young people to vote, not making it difficult."

To Morgan, the office should be more clerical in nature and there to help people interact with government, rather than make it harder. Morgan not only wants to reverse the ID policy

He also believes his experience as a publishing company owner—a company he and his wife built that produced state and city statistical reference books and was sold to Congressional Quarterly in 2007—makes him an attractive candidate for the office.

"That's what most of the office is," he said. "You are the keeper of records, and there needs to be transparency. We just need leadership to provide clarity and focus, and to make that office as accessible as possible. That isn't Kobach's priority, and it never has been.

"Data is there for the public and it needs to be accessible. That's important to the office and to Kansans."

But for Morgan, making voting in Kansas an inclusive experience rather than an exclusive one, is vital to his campaign.

"You want people — no matter their political stripe — to vote," he said. "We have some in our party and in the tea party that talk about the fear of government regulation, yet they're regulating the voter. It's weird to me. We should welcome people.

Morgan said he would accomplish that by making voting easier. For instance, he'd like to let people vote at different polling places than the ones for the precincts in which they're registered. Eventually he'd like to allow people to vote online.

Morgan said that Kobach's "fear mongering" about illegal aliens voting is off-base.

"From 1997 to 2012 10 million people voted in Kansas," he said. "And Kobach claims there were 235 incidents, with 18 of those being illegal immigrants, and five of those (immigrants) are alleged to have voted.

Because of those five people, he said the state is preventing thousands from

voting.

"Those numbers don't add up to me at all. It's when people feel they're out of the system that people get scary, because they don't feel like they have a voice."

He said it shouldn't matter what party the secretary of state is.

"It shouldn't matter at all. Kobach is so scared of 'bad' people voting — especially illegal immigrants — but traditionally, the office hasn't been that way. You'd go around schools encouraging kids to be involved in the process. You'd go to civic organizations and encourage people to get in the system.

Morgan, who served as chief counsel for Gov. Mike Hayden and was the Republican nominee for US Congress from the 2nd District in 1990, knows it won't be easy to topple Kobach.

The incumbent, after all, has plenty of financial backing.

Still, the two-term Lawrence school board member and former school board president feels a duty to try.

"I know this is an uphill battle," Morgan said. "But we have to start running against these people and show that this isn't us."

Morgan knows most will label him as a moderate Republican. And he understands there's a feeling in the state and the nation as a whole that his brand of a more center-right GOP is a disappearing one.

But Morgan, who met Republican President Dwight Eisenhower in Abilene as a small boy, still believes the GOP can help the country.

"We need a responsible center-right party, and GOP at its best times is," he said. "We're a country of 300 million people, and we're not going to agree on everything. Having worked for Bob Dole, I saw what could be done when you work with people. He'd work with anybody. He thought it was better to get a lot of what you wanted rather than none of what you wanted. I haven't given up on the Republican Party."

Morgan will face Kobach on Aug. 5 for the Republican primary. The winner will face Democratic candidate Jean Schodorf, a former state senator from Wichita.