https://tucson.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/hobbs-nixes-allowing-arizona-counties-to-do-fullhandcounts-of-elections/article_bda550a4-0c83-11ee-a5f5-bffc74ef06fb.html



Governor Katie Hobbs Kelly Presnell, Arizona Daily Star

Hobbs nixes allowing Arizona counties to do full hand counts of elections

Howard Fischer Capitol Media Services
Jun 16, 2023

Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed such a proposal Friday, along with vetoes on other issues involving public access to teacher training materials and restrictions on state contracts and investment strategies.

She has now vetoed 119 measures approved by the Republican-controlled Legislature this year.

Rep. Gail Griffin, a Hereford Republican, had proposed allowing whatever official is in charge of elections to do a hand count rather than use automatic tabulating equipment. Hobbs said that was unacceptable.

"Hand-counting ballots is unquestionably less accurate and more time consuming than machine tabulation," Hobbs wrote. "Arizona voters deserve to know that their votes are being counted accurately and efficiently."

The veto is unlikely to end the legal fight.

Griffin, in writing the measure, insisted state law always has allowed for hand counts. She said her proposal would simply "clarify existing law."

But Griffin acknowledged she worked with Cochise County Recorder David Stevens, a fellow Republican, to craft the measure. Cochise County sought to do a full hand count of the 2022 general election after its two Republican supervisors questioned the accuracy of machine counting and wanted to count all the ballots by hand.

That ended only when a judge blocked the move. The judge said state law allows election officials to take only a 2% random sample of ballots from the entire batch, count them by hand, and then compare the result with the machine tally

The issue has not gone away. Earlier this month the Mohave County Board of Supervisors voted to explore doing a hand count of the 2024 election.

That came after backing by state Senate Majority Leader Sonny Borrelli, R-Lake Havasu City. He told the supervisors that electronic tabulating machines are vulnerable to being hacked.

Borrelli, who called it a "national security issue," argued that the state cannot block such a hand count.

That's not the position of Secretary of State Adrian Fontes, a Democrat. In a letter to the board, he said a hand count could increase the risk of error.

Fontes also said a full hand count would put county officials "in serious legal jeopardy, including possible criminal liability, for violations of state law."

During committee debate on the issue, Sen. Anna Hernandez said she had a more basic reason for voting against the measure. The Phoenix Democrat said she could not support anything "pushed by those who advance conspiracy theories."

Teacher training

Separately on Friday, Hobbs vetoed a proposal by Rep. Justin Heap, R-Mesa, that would have given parents access to all the materials school districts used to train teachers.

Heap showed colleagues what he said was a list of subjects in training sessions that teachers from Mesa Unified School District were being required to attend. They included anti-racism, non-binary, unconscious biases, restorative justice and equity.

All those are issues with which parents may disagree, Heap said.

Rep. Judy Schwiebert, D-Phoenix, asked him what is wrong with teachers learning about some of these issues like equity.

Heap said it would be fine to provide instruction on issues of equality. But equity, he said, is different, dealing with issues of being fair rather than of being equal.

"Who decides what's fair and what's not?" Heap asked. He said equity gets into things like whether a group that has been historically marginalized should get special treatment.

Heap also said what is in his bill is no different than existing laws that already give parents access to the curriculum being used in classrooms.

Hobbs, in her veto message, said her objection was more basic. She said making these training materials available to the public would put schools at risk of violating copyright law.

State contracts, investments

The governor also rejected a proposal by Sen. Anthony Kern, R-Glendale, to prohibit government agencies from refusing to contract with private firms unless they have or adopt environmental, social or governance standards policies.

"I do not believe that tying the hands of the state's procurement and investment professionals is in the best interests of the people of Arizona," Hobbs wrote.

She also vetoed a similar proposal that would have barred the state treasurer, whose investments include buying corporate stocks, from using the voting right that comes with those shares to support proposals that would advance social, environmental, political or other goals. Under that bill, the state also could not in any way use its investment funds to boycott a company involved in fossil fuels or nuclear energy.

"Politicizing decisions based made by the state's investment professionals can harm our state's long-term fiscal health," Hobbs wrote.