

Shoshone County Coroner

	Julie Hernandez	Richard Rick Smith
1. What is your name, what office are you running for and why are you running for this position?	My name is Julie Hernandez, and I am running for Shoshone County Coroner. I believe that to see change, you must step up and serve. I am running because serving Shoshone County is how I live out my faith and demonstrate love for my neighbors. The coroner carries the profound responsibility of writing the final chapter of a person's life story, and I am running to be the leader voters can trust to honor that sacred duty.	No Response Received
2. Senate Bill 1101 passed in 2025 updating the responsibilities of the coroner. What is your opinion on the mandate for coroners to be present at the scene when there is a suspicious, accidental or unattended death?	I support the core intent of Senate Bill 1101, which establishes necessary statewide accountability for death investigations. The 2024 Office of Performance Evaluations report revealed critical gaps, including inconsistent investigations and the nation's lowest homicide autopsy rate. While Senate Bill 1101 does not strictly mandate a coroner's physical presence at every single scene, it correctly mandates that coroners fully take responsibility as medicolegal death investigators rather than over-relying on law enforcement. I am committed to upholding these rigorous investigative standards to ensure accuracy, fairness, and transparency for every family in Shoshone County.	No Response Received
3. In your opinion, are there enough funds allocated to the coroner's office to meet the needs of the projected growth in the county?	No, current funding is unlikely to be sufficient to meet Shoshone County's future needs. While projections estimate our 2026 population at 14,299, based on a 1.9% annual growth rate, those estimates may not fully account for additional workers associated with newly opening local mines. Because Shoshone County does not have local forensic pathologists or centralized autopsy facilities, we must contract for these services at a cost of thousands of dollars per autopsy. When potential population growth is combined with new statutory requirements affecting medicolegal death investigations, our limited local tax base and tightly constrained county budget could face increasing financial pressure. My priority will be to meet our statutory responsibilities while protecting taxpayers. The goal is straightforward: provide thorough, professional death investigations while making responsible use of every taxpayer dollar.	No Response Received
4. In your opinion, how well does the coroner's office work with the Spokane County Medical Examiner? Do you have recommended improvements?	The Shoshone County Coroner's office currently maintains a functional and efficient relationship with the Spokane County Medical Examiner. In my direct outreach to their office regarding autopsy turnaround times, they responded promptly and professionally. As a vital regional hub, the Spokane County Medical Examiner's office manages a high volume of cases for under-resourced counties across Eastern Washington and neighboring border regions. Because I have not been informed of any existing operational issues between our offices, I do not have recommended improvements at this time and look forward to continuing this reliable partnership.	No Response Received
5. Are there checks and balances that the coroner provides in respect to other elected officials?	Yes, the coroner serves as an essential, independent check and balance within the justice system by conducting impartial death investigations. Under Article 18, Section 6 of the Idaho Constitution, the coroner is an independently elected official who answers directly to the citizens rather than the sheriff, prosecutor, or county commissioners. This structural autonomy ensures that determining the cause and manner of sudden, violent, or suspicious deaths remains free from outside political or law enforcement influence. Because other county entities cannot pressure or fire the coroner, this independence guarantees transparency, objectivity, and accountability for the people of Shoshone County.	No Response Received

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6. In your opinion, as an elected official, who do you see yourself accountable to and why?	As an elected official, my primary and absolute accountability is to the citizens of Shoshone County. Holding public office is a public trust, and because the coroner's role is to legally represent the deceased, I answer directly to the constituents and the rule of law. Since taxpayer dollars fund government positions, elected officials work for the people—not for political entities or private interests. I believe democracy functions best when citizens are active participants, and I am fully committed to providing the transparency and accessibility they need to hold my office accountable.	No Response Received
7. How would you utilize the budget that you manage while being fiscally responsible?	I will maximize fiscal responsibility by prioritizing our statutory mandates, identifying operational efficiencies, and actively pursuing opportunities to share regional resources. To protect our local tax base from rising autopsy costs, I will focus available resources on required medicolegal death investigations. Determining when an autopsy is necessary requires careful judgment and is one of the most important responsibilities of the coroner. I am committed to using the resources available to the office responsibly and making every taxpayer dollar count while ensuring thorough, accurate, and professional death investigations.	No Response Received
8. Do you believe the mandated 24 hours of continuing education every two years is good enough for coroners to maintain their skills? Why or why not?	Yes, the mandated 24 hours of continuing education every two years is sufficient to maintain necessary skills, but the real issue is enforcement and accountability. According to a 2024 report by the Office of Performance Evaluations, many Idaho coroners either fail to complete these hours or fail to report them to the Idaho State Association of County Coroners (ISACC), and there are currently no penalties for non-compliance. While the hours themselves are adequate for skill maintenance, success ultimately depends on the integrity of the elected official. As coroner, I will do my due diligence by strictly completing my hours, logging them transparently with ISACC, and keeping the public informed.	No Response Received
9. Do you believe the six Row Officers (assessor, sheriff, prosecuting attorney, treasurer, coroner, and clerk) should be appointed or stay elected? Why or why not?	I strongly believe that the six Row Officers, including the coroner, must remain elected positions. Elections are the primary mechanism for citizens to hold their representatives directly accountable to both the public and the rule of law. Because these offices serve and impact every resident, every citizen deserves a voice in choosing who fills them. Keeping these roles elected ensures that public officials remain public servants who are directly answerable to the community, rather than appointed figures who answer only to a small group of county leaders.	No Response Received
10. In recent years some groups have advocated for legalizing marijuana in our state, do you support or oppose the legalization of marijuana? Why or why not?	I support the legalization and regulation of marijuana strictly for medicinal purposes. Medical legalization ensures patients receive safe, lab-tested products free from dangerous illicit-market contaminants like mold or pesticides. Cannabis serves as a vital tool to effectively alleviate chronic pain, epilepsy symptoms, and chemotherapy-induced nausea. Furthermore, it provides patients with a less addictive, physically safer alternative to harsh prescription painkillers like opioid-based medications.	No Response Received

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11. What is your background and why do you believe it qualifies you for this position?	My more than a decade of experience as a Registered Nurse has prepared me to serve as County Coroner. My background includes forensic nursing at Eastern State Psychiatric Hospital, acute care at Valley and Holy Family Hospitals, and my current role at Shoshone Medical Center. This extensive medical background has equipped me to interpret complex clinical records, evaluate medical histories, recognize significant medical findings, and reconstruct the physiological events that may have contributed to a death. Just as importantly, years of nursing have prepared me to remain calm, professional in high-stress situations, and to communicate with grieving families with empathy, clarity, and respect. I plan to build on this experience by attending ISACC-endorsed coroner school to gain specialized medicolegal death-investigation training. My goal: to combine medical knowledge, forensic experience, and continued education to serve Shoshone County with professionalism, accuracy, and compassion.	No Response Received