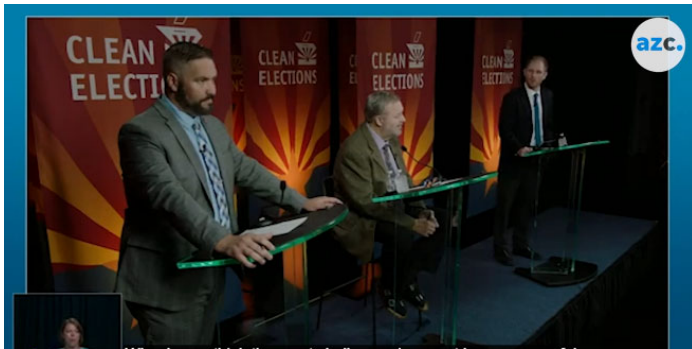


# Inartful dodge: Justin Heap's refusal to debate is an insult to Maricopa County voters

*Justin Heap, the MAGA Republican who knocked off Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer in July, won't be debating his Democratic opponent, Tim Stringham. Questions, after all, are scary things.*



**Laurie Roberts** Arizona Republic Published · Sept. 10, 2024 | Updated · Sept. 12, 2024



## **GOP Maricopa County recorder candidates debate previous election challenges**

In a debate on June 24, 2024, Republican candidates for Maricopa County recorder Stephen Richer, Justin Heap and Don Hiatt discuss election challenges and how they operate in Arizona. *The Republic*

State Rep. Justin Heap, the MAGA Republican who knocked off Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer in the primary, has repeatedly pledged to bring more transparency and honesty to Arizona's elections.

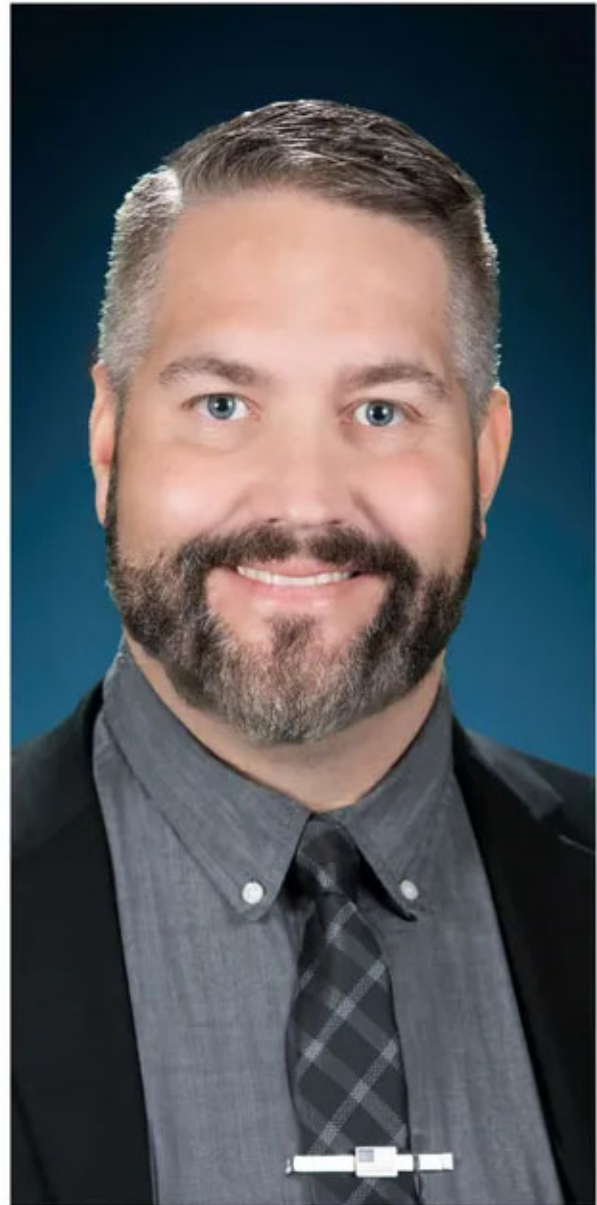
Sadly, however, he apparently has no interest in bringing transparency and honesty to Arizona's voters.

Heap is ducking both of this week's planned debates with his Democratic opponent, Tim Stringham.

KAET/PBS and the Citizens Clean Elections Commission invited the two candidates to face off on Wednesday and Thursday, respectively.

It's the best chance for voters to see two relative unknowns who are competing for one of the county's key election posts — one that oversees the voter rolls and early voting.

## **Stringham said yes. Heap didn't even answer**



Tim Stringham (left) and Justin Heap *Provided By The Candidates*

Stringham, a military veteran and U.S. Navy attorney making his first run for office, agreed to both debates.

Heap didn't even bother to reply to the invitations.

But then, Heap has dodged questions all year about whether he believes Arizona's elections are rigged.

His backers certainly do.

He's a member of the Arizona Freedom Caucus, which is home sweet home for the Legislature's stolen- election crowd. He was recruited to run by Sen. Jake Hoffman, the indicted fake elector who chairs the Freedom Caucus.

He's supported by some of the state's most prominent election deniers, including Kari Lake and Turning Point USA's Charlie Kirk.

## Heap's dodge at the last debate was telling



### **GOP Maricopa County recorder primary debate**

Justin Heap, Don Hiatt and incumbent Stephen Richer faced off in the 2024 GOP county recorder Citizens Clean Elections debate on Monday, June 24, 2024.

He's voted for bills that are the Holy Grail of the MAGA movement, including proposals to require the hand counting of ballots and to end the state's wildly popular early voting program.

He got a prime speaking spot at Donald Trump's last rally in Arizona, and they don't generally dole those out to people who think Trump lost in 2020.

Yet Heap has refuses to answer questions about whether he believes the 2020 and 2022 elections were stolen.

During the June primary debate, two of the three Republican candidates for county recorder were crystal clear when asked whether the 2020 and 2022 elections were stolen.

Richer insisted they weren't. Don Hiatt insisted they were.

Heap dodged the question.

### **Stringham has promised to preserve early voting**

Stringham, meanwhile, decided to run for public office in the aftermath of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the nation's Capitol.

He's promised to preserve early voting, calling it "the single easiest way to ensure you can exercise your right to vote, even as you try to raise your family, work multiple jobs, or run your own business."

He'll be there this week, answering questions, even if his opponent won't.

Unsurprisingly, Heap didn't respond to my question about why he's a no-show at this week's debates.

He's likely hoping to lay low and slide into office, as conservatives often do in down-ballot county races.

### **Questions Justin Heap should answer**

Me? I'd like to know why he supports a hand count of votes when hand counts are notoriously inaccurate.

I'd like to know why he wants to eliminate the early voting program used by 80% to 90% of Arizona voters — a program that was used for three decades with no problem. Until Donald Trump lost, that is, and suddenly it was a hotbed of supposed fraud and corruption.

And I'd really like to know what he found so funny last year — as he wrote, "LOL" — when a MAGA supporter posted a GIF mocking Republican Supervisor Bill Gates. This, after Gates announced that he'd been diagnosed with PTSD following three years of threats to his family from the conspiracy crowd.

Just what is it about the threats — the ones that elections officials both here and across the land have endured the last four years — that is so hilarious?

In a debate, perhaps we could find out.

But then, I guess you don't have to answer questions if you aren't there.

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