



SECRETARY OF STATE UPDATE

The Honorable John A. Gale, Nebraska

Summer 2007

Nebraska voting system is a national model

BY JOHN GALE

The newest twist in election administration is the return to something old – the paper ballot. And that represents good news for Nebraska.

After all the voting problems that were exposed with the 2000 presidential election, Congress stepped in and mandated major national election reform with the passage of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002.

States responded by upgrading their voting equipment. A popular choice was the acquisition of touch-screen voting equipment, called direct recording electronic (DRE) machines.

However, the DRE machines have quickly gone out of favor. There have been widespread concerns that the machines were vulnerable to hackers, were unreliable and left no verifiable paper trail for recounts.

The repudiation of paperless DRE

equipment is perhaps best illustrated by the action taken by the state of Florida – the epicenter of the disputed 2000 presidential election.

Florida has decided to abandon the DRE machines that many of its counties installed after the 2000 election. In May, Florida Gov. Charlie Crist signed legislation that mandates a system of paper ballots counted by optical-scan machines.

Florida is moving to the same system that Nebraska is using.

The assault on paperless DRE machines is also underway in Washington, D.C. There is widespread support in Congress for legislation that would require that a voter-verifiable paper ballot be used or produced for every vote cast.

The legislation would provide significant federal funding for states to replace and upgrade their voting equipment to reach compliance.

I'm pleased to report that Nebraska looks very good amid all this election administration turmoil.

In response to HAVA, my office decided to build Nebraska's election system around the optical-scan paper ballot. With the aid of federal funds, we purchased new optical-scan machines for all 93 counties.

This had the advantage of bringing election uniformity to Nebraska, since counties were split between counting ballots by hand and by optical-scan machines.

At the time, we felt that a paper-ballot system had a lot of advantages. It's reliable and cost effective, voters find it easy to use, and the ability to conduct accurate recounts is preserved.

Recent history has proven that our assessment was correct. Nebraska's election system is in excellent shape, and it appears that other states will be following our lead.

New tracking system for regulations is introduced

The Secretary of State's Office has implemented an improved tracking system for proposed rules and regulations for state agencies.

The new online system uses an easy-to-use spreadsheet and follows proposed rules and regulations from the scheduled hearing date until they become effective.

"The new system is both extremely useful and user-friendly," Secretary of State John Gale said. "The process is much easier to track now."

He said the improved system fits into his goal of making government information accessible to the public in more efficient and useable ways.

The impetus for the new system came from dissatisfaction expressed about the previous system and the need to better coordinate the three offices involved in the process – the secretary of state, attorney general and governor.

"We have received many positive comments about the new system from the public and state agencies," Gale said.

The new system features a customer survey in which people can provide their feedback and comments.

Statehood Day celebration



David Seay (left) and Chris Sayre provide musical entertainment at a Nebraska Statehood Day birthday party in Scottsbluff on March 1. Secretary of State John Gale sponsored eight such parties for school children throughout the state from Feb. 26 to March 1. See Page 3 for a story on the parties.

New requirements set for notary public seals

New requirements for ink stamp seals used by notaries public are mandated by LB 382, which the Legislature passed May 10.

Previously, a notary could use a seal with his or her initials on it rather than the full or commissioned name and without the expiration date of the commission.

Under LB 382, the seal must include the notary's name as commissioned and the date on which his or her commission will expire. Existing notaries do not have to purchase a new conforming seal until they renew their commissions.

The Secretary of State's Office supported the bill as a means to standardize requirements and avoid challenges to documents.

Gale gains appointment to civics education panel

Secretary of State John Gale was appointed in March to a new state advisory council on civics education.

The 14-member Civics Nebraska Partnership Advisory Council will advise the state Board of Education to ensure civics education is part of the education of all students.

"I believe civics education needs to be a much higher priority in our Nebraska schools," Gale said.

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The office can be contacted at the following:

Secretary of State
P.O. Box 94608
State Capitol, Suite 2300
Lincoln, NE 68509-4608
Phone: (402) 471-4070
Fax: (402) 471-3237

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Capitol Forum provides global perspective

High School students throughout Nebraska got a taste of international diplomacy at the ninth annual Nebraska Capitol Forum on America's Future held at the State Capitol on March 26.

Sponsored by the Nebraska Humanities Council and Secretary of State John Gale, the program provides an opportunity for students to study and discuss important foreign policy and global issues.

Gale and Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy addressed the 87 students from 22 schools attending the event. Three members of the Nebraska congressional delegation – Sen. Chuck Hagel and Reps. Jeff Fortenberry and Adrian Smith – participated via video conferencing from Washington, D.C.

The students attending the Lincoln event were there as representatives of entire classes. All students in the classes participated in aspects of the program.

Capitol Forum is part of Gale's mis-



Participants pose for a group photo at the State Capitol on March 26.

sion to provide insights into global affairs and America's role in the world for Nebraska students. "With our global community, programs like Capitol Forum are becoming increasingly important in educating our Nebraska students," he said.

For the 2006-07 school year, 17 states participated in Capitol Forum, which is coordinated by Brown University of Providence, R.I.

Hall of fame recognizes longtime poll workers

Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale honored 255 Nebraskans in April for inclusion in the Poll Worker Hall of Fame.

The program, established in 2006, honors poll workers who have served a minimum of 20 years. Each honoree received a letter and certificate from Gale.

Six of the honorees have served as poll workers for 50 or more years. This group includes Betty Etherton of Cozad, 50 years; Clifford Geiken of Gothen-

burg, 57 years; Rita M. Hinds of Lexington, 50 years; Margret E. Jacobsen of Fremont, 51 years; Martha M. Christo of Fremont, 51 years; and Helen G. Kracl of Fremont, 56 years.

Gale said he established the program to make sure that longtime workers are properly recognized for their dedicated service.

"These honorees are unsung heroes who make it possible for our democracy to operate," he said. "They deserve our gratitude and a big thank you."

Elections Division holds training for new officials

The secretary of state's Elections Division held a workshop in Lincoln on Feb. 28 and March 1 for new county election officials.

Thirty-five officials from 23 counties attended the meeting, which provided an overview of equipment, systems, procedures and legal requirements related to elections.

"With so many new county clerks

taking office at the first of the year, we thought it was a good time to hold this workshop," said Becky Richter, assistant election manager. "I think the officials appreciated the opportunity to receive this crash course on elections."

The workshop was part of the secretary of state's ongoing mission to provide training for election officials and poll workers.

Statehood Day parties provide fun and education for students

Some 3,000 elementary school students and 500 adults attended eight Nebraska Statehood Day birthday parties throughout the state from Feb. 26 to March 1.

Secretary of State John Gale, the NEBRASKAland Foundation and the Nebraska Humanities Council sponsored the parties that celebrated the 140th anniversary of Nebraska becoming a state on March 1, 1867.

The parties were held in Omaha, Boys Town, Nebraska City, Lincoln, Kearney, McCook, Scottsbluff and Chadron. A March 2 party scheduled for Norfolk had to be canceled because of a snow storm.

Participating students enjoyed musical entertainment, interactive skits on Nebraska state symbols, sing-alongs and performers in historical costumes, including Gale who portrayed "Cactus Jack."

The parties are part of Gale's mission to provide civics education to the state's

youth. "We want the parties to be fun for the students in a setting that emphasizes state pride, state history and the joy of learning," he said.

The parties are geared for fourth-grade students because they study Nebraska history during the school year.

Originally, there was a single party held each year at the State Capitol. Gale has grown the event to multiple parties statewide.



Secretary of State John Gale, portraying "Cactus Jack," is shown at the Chadron party on March 1.

Democrats adopt presidential caucuses

Nebraska's election landscape in 2008 will change as Democrats will hold presidential caucuses on Saturday, Feb. 9.

Nebraska Democrats decided to take this step in the hope that the caucuses will give them more influence in the process of picking the party's presidential nominee.

Typically, the presidential nominees in the Democratic and Republican parties have been decided by the time of Nebraska's May primary.

Nebraska Republicans are planning to stick with the May 13 primary for the presidential race.

"The desire of Nebraska Democrats to have an impact on the presidential race is certainly understandable," Secretary of State John Gale said.

He noted that the proximity of the Jan. 14 caucuses in Iowa, the kickoff state in the nominating process, could help the Nebraska caucuses. "Hopefully, Democratic candidates campaigning in Iowa also will make appearances in Nebraska," he said.

Gale said the presidential nominating process is badly in need of reform, citing the extreme early start of the 2008 race and the front-loading of state primaries.

He said he would favor a system of staggered regional primaries, with the regions alternating their order of sequence in succeeding election years.

"I think this plan would be of great benefit to our democratic system and would elevate Nebraska's role in the nominating process," he said.

Records Center battles ongoing space crunch at downtown building

The secretary of state's Records Management Division has gained some needed breathing space for the storage of state paper records.

In recent years, the division has been faced with a severe space shortage at its State Records Center, which is housed along with the division's other operations at the K Street Complex in downtown Lincoln.

The center recently gained 14,000 cubic feet of storage in the building when it took over space formerly occupied by the state Health and Human Services System. The additional space brings the center's capacity to 75,000 cubic feet.

In addition, the Records Management Division in recent months has been actively urging state agencies to dispose of records that have been held past dates listed in retention schedules. These efforts have been successful in freeing up needed space.

"We've bought ourselves maybe one year of breathing room," Secretary of State John Gale said. "After that, we'll be back to a storage crunch and will have to explore options to deal with it."

Limited co-op associations gain legislative approval

A new business entity known as a limited cooperative association was authorized in Nebraska under LB 368, which the Legislature passed May 10.

The Secretary of State's Office will handle filings of the new entity.

Traditional cooperative businesses limit participation to patron members who use the cooperative's services by buying or selling from the cooperative. Federal and state laws restrict the ability of traditional cooperatives to seek equity capital to fund start-up costs, expansion or other activities.

A limited cooperative association combines the elements of traditional cooperatives with the ability to raise investment capital. Investor members could earn a return on their investment without participating in the association.

Children show Nebraska spirit in art contest

Nebraska elementary school students have plenty of state spirit.

They demonstrated that with their artwork in the Nebraska Spirit Art Contest, which was designed to promote the state to the Internet community.

The contest for students in kindergarten through fifth grade was sponsored by Secretary of State John Gale and Nebraska.gov, the state's official Web portal.

The winners in each grade will have their work featured for one year on a downloadable screen saver available at www.nebraska.gov.

The winners were: Carson Amack of Henderson, kindergarten; Brittany Quiring of Henderson, first grade; Vanessa Taylor of Ainsworth, second grade; Brigett Effenbeck of Deshler, third grade; Devin Lally of Grand Island, fourth grade; and Brooke Olmer of Columbus, fifth grade.

"I am pleased that we have the opportunity to show the world the winners' wonderful artwork that represents their

proud Nebraska spirit," Gale said.

The winners were determined through online voting from May 11-25 that involved five finalists from each grade.

On June 8, the winners and their

families were hosted to a day of activities in Lincoln, including a ceremony with Gov. Dave Heineman and Gale, a tour of the State Capitol, a luncheon at the Governor's Mansion and an outing to the Lincoln Children's Zoo.



Secretary of State John Gale (left) and Gov. Dave Heineman pose with the winners of the Nebraska Spirit Art Contest. Winners (from left) are Vanessa Taylor of Ainsworth, Brooke Olmer of Columbus, Brigett Effenbeck of Deshler, Brittany Quiring of Henderson, Carson Amack of Henderson and Devin Lally of Grand Island.

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JOHN A. GALE
Nebraska Secretary of State
P.O. Box 94608
Lincoln, NE 68509-4608