

STATE OF NEBRASKA

John A. Gale
Secretary of State

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 6, 2004

CONTACT: Neal Erickson
402-471-4127

Secretary of State Gale predicts 28 percent turnout for primary

LINCOLN – A shortage of high-profile races is expected to keep voter turnout low for the May 11 primary election in Nebraska, according to Secretary of State John Gale. He predicted a turnout of 28 percent of the state's registered voters.

“Voter turnout is one of the biggest challenges in American elections today,” Gale said. “Nebraska is no exception. Civic pride or civic duty no longer drives turnout as much as controversy or notoriety.

“Unfortunately, in our May primary there is scant evidence that citizens are focused on issues stirring public attention. Looking at the state as a whole, with the exception of the First Congressional District, there are very few races that are expected to pump up the turnout. I would love to be proven wrong, but signs point to a turnout on the low side.”

He said a positive sign is that voter registration in the state for the May primary is a record high – 1,087,877. The breakdown by political affiliation is: Republican Party, 544,993; Democratic Party, 378,165; Libertarian Party, 4,206; Nebraska Party, 3,332; Green Party, 158; and nonpartisan, 157,023.

Gale cited the following factors that are likely to suppress voter interest in the May primary:

- The presidential nomination for the Democratic Party has been locked up.
- There is no U.S. Senate race this year, and of the three congressional districts, only the First District has races that are drawing interest in the primary.
- There are no statewide issues on the ballot.
- This is an off year for elections on the county level. Only a limited number of county board races will be decided this year.

Statewide voting turnout for the primary is likely to be hurt by the turnout in the Omaha-dominated Second Congressional District, Gale said, citing a lack of interest-generating races in that area.

However, the turnout in the Second District could be offset somewhat by higher voting levels in the other congressional districts, he said. The Third District, which comprises the western part of the state, traditionally has the highest turnout of the three districts. In addition, contested congressional races on both the Republican and Democratic sides are expected to draw voters in the First District, which includes Lincoln and portions of eastern Nebraska.

To motivate voters, Gale urged Republicans and Democrats to express their pride in their parties' presidential nominees. "Even though the presidential nominees are decided, voters can still send a message of support by casting ballots," he said.

The last two statewide primary elections have seen low turnouts – 22.7 percent in 2002 and 31.1 percent in 2000.

#