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**News Release**  
April 29, 2005

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## **Gale represents U.S. at international elections conference**

LINCOLN – Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale had the honor of serving as an official U.S. delegate to an international elections conference held April 21-22 in Vienna, Austria.

The conference, which attracted over 200 delegates, was sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), a 55-nation body that includes the United States.

“It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I was deeply honored to be asked to be a member of the U.S. delegation,” said Gale, who serves as chief election officer for Nebraska.

The other members of the U.S. delegation were Paul DeGregorio, vice chairman of the U.S. Elections Assistance Commission, and Ambassador Robert Barry, who has headed a number of election observer missions, including most recently to Afghanistan.

The conference was intended to center on emerging election technologies, but that focus shifted due to efforts by Russia and Belarus to alter OSCE’s election observation activities in ways that many participants believed would weaken the observation framework.

The concern of Russia arose from the peaceful protests in the countries of Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, following flawed elections. OSCE election observers were present at those elections and quickly pointed out the evidence of fraud and manipulation.

Alexander Veshnyakov, chairman of Russia’s Central Election Commission, said that OSCE’s observer missions should be politically neutral and should not deliver what he called “political judgments” immediately after elections are held.

Gale delivered the opening statement on behalf of the U.S. delegation, saying that one problem that needs to be faced is a lack of will in some countries to live up to the OSCE commitments on

free and fair elections. “When the political will to hold free and fair elections is present, significant improvements towards meeting OSCE standards for democratic elections follow,” he said.

Together with other participating delegations, the U.S. delegation firmly resisted efforts by Russia and Belarus to amend OSCE standards adopted in 1990 that call for international election observers and clear and objective methods for measuring whether national elections in member states are fair and democratic.

“As a result of my participation at the conference, I became even more firmly convinced that free and fair elections in the emerging nations of the former Soviet Union are critical to the future of a peaceful Europe, as well ultimately to a positive diplomatic and trade relationship with Russia,” Gale said.

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