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Gale issues statement on conduct of Douglas County election

LINCOLN – Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale issued the following statement on allegations made regarding the conduct of the Nov. 2, 2004, general election in Douglas County:

In light of the accusations being directed at Douglas County Election Commissioner Carlos Castillo by Nebraska Democratic Party officials, I believe it is appropriate for me, as chief election officer of Nebraska, to address some of the charges.

Democratic Party officials have alleged that Mr. Castillo made it difficult for the largely African-American population in north Omaha to vote in the Nov. 2, 2004, general election. They cite the following alleged obstacles: changing of polling places, long lines to vote, insufficient number of ballots and a disproportionate use of provisional ballots.

Following the November election, my office conducted an investigation of election problems that occurred throughout the state as part of our reporting duties to the Board of State Canvassers. We gathered information, made inquiries and asked for written responses from election officials, including Douglas County, regarding areas of concern

Our investigation revealed no evidence of discriminatory treatment, deliberate voter suppression or violation of civil rights laws by election officials in regard to north Omaha.

Our investigation revealed complaints about long lines and running out of ballots in Douglas County. But these complaints dealt with some precincts in west Omaha, not north Omaha.

Our investigation looked into concerns about the relatively large number of provisional votes cast in Douglas County. But there was no indication that the problem was centered in north Omaha.

We in the election community know that no election is perfect. Douglas County experienced some difficulties in the November election, but those problems were largely due to the extraordinary high voter turnout.

For Democratic Party officials to suggest that voters in north Omaha experienced discriminatory treatment is simply unfounded and grossly unfair to the dedicated election officials and poll workers in Douglas County. These suggestions unjustly undermine public confidence in the election system in the county.

From my viewpoint, Mr. Castillo has worked hard and diligently to ensure fair elections.

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