



SECRETARY OF STATE UPDATE

The Honorable John A. Gale

Summer 2005

Vision for office is producing positive results

BY JOHN GALE

After practicing law for 30 years in North Platte, I became secretary of state in 2000. I have pursued a clear vision for this office of providing quality public service. I brought business methods to management of the office, sought an effective and efficient personnel team, instituted new rules of fairness for decision-making and sought to bring govern-

ment closer to the people.

I believe my vision for the office is producing positive results in a number of areas, as evidenced by developments in 2005.

Here is a brief report on recent activities.

The elections area has been particu-



larly busy. I want to mention developments in three areas.

First, my office has begun the task of converting all 93 Nebraska counties to a statewide voter registration system. This is a massive undertaking and will revolutionize the way voter registration is done in the state.

Second, the work of the Vote Ne-

See Activities, Page 2

Conversion to new voter registration system begins

Voter registration in Nebraska is entering a new era.

The Secretary of State's Office is overseeing the conversion of Nebraska's 93 counties to a new statewide voter registration system.

The computer system will enable Nebraska to comply with the federal Help America Vote Act, which requires that states implement centralized voter registration systems. In the past, voter registration in Nebraska has been done on a county-by-county basis.

County officials will be able to register voters, qualify candidates and manage elections with the new system.

The system will cost about \$4 million and will be entirely paid with federal funds. The vendor for the system is Election Systems & Software of Omaha.

"This state-of-the-art technology represents a major upgrade for handling elections," said Secretary of State John Gale.

He said the system will have the following benefits: it allows interaction

between counties on such issues as duplicate registrations; it allows uniform maintenance of voting rolls; it allows coordination with databases of other state agencies; and it provides county election officials with more tools to manage elections.

Counties are being converted to the system over a period of months. The first group of counties was converted in June. It is expected that the final group of counties will be converted by mid-October.

Management team sees changes

Secretary of State John Gale has named a new chief deputy and promoted a longtime employee to the position of deputy.

Ronald Moravec of Lincoln, who has served as Cass County attorney and an assistant Nebraska attorney general, is the new chief deputy.

Moravec, who started work July 1, will serve as chief legal counsel for the office, among other duties. He succeeds Greg Lemon, who resigned to pursue other legal interests.

"Ron brings a wealth of legal, government and management experience to this position," Gale said.

In addition, Gale has promoted Bill Ptacek to deputy secretary of state for records management.

Ptacek has worked for the state for 36 years, including 30 years as head of the Records Management Division. The promotion was effective July 7.



Secretary of State John Gale (left) conducts the swearing-in ceremony for new Chief Deputy Ronald Moravec.

Revised notary law means added duties

The Secretary of State's Office has assumed increased responsibilities in administering notaries public since the state's revised notary law went into effect in July 2004.

The legislation made extensive changes regarding notaries, including a requirement that new applicants had to pass a test to receive a notary commission. The office is processing about 100 tests per week.

"We are pleased that the passage rate for the tests is excellent," said Secretary of State John Gale. "We think this is an indication that the notary information posted on our Web site has been helpful."

With the revised law, the office also has stepped up its enforcement efforts. When documents are submitted to the office for processing and there is something wrong with the notarization, the notary is sent a letter explaining the error.

The errors cover a wide range of issues but include such serious matters as pre-dating or post-dating the date used in the attestation clause, notarizing a document of a relative (which is now prohibited) and notarizing documents without a commission.

"We are very serious in making sure that Nebraska notaries strictly follow the provisions of the law in carrying out their duties," Gale said.

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Gale represents U.S. at diplomatic conference

Secretary of State John Gale got a first-hand look at the diplomatic world when he served as a member of a U.S. Department of State delegation to an international elections conference in Vienna, Austria.

The April 21-22 conference was sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 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



Secretary of State John Gale and his wife, Carol, enjoyed a boat ride on the Danube River while in Vienna, Austria.

Robert Barry, who has headed a number of election observer missions, including most recently to Afghanistan.

"As a result of 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 as ultimately to a positive diplomatic and trade relationship with Russia," Gale said.

Activities

Continued from Page 1

braska Initiative task force was completed with the issuance of its report that recommended 16 measures to try to increase voter turnout in the state. I served as chairperson of this group, which was formed by the Legislature.

Third, my office was actively involved in many of the election-related bills that were passed by the 2005 Legislature. These bills are designed to make our election system more flexible, more user-friendly and better capable of providing voting options.

We are also making progress in the area of electronic government as evidenced by the redesign of the state's Web site. Under the new name of Nebraska.gov., the site offers improvements to make it easier for visitors to find information and services. The redesign was done under the guidance of the Nebraska Records Board, which I chair.

My work as chairperson of the Nebraska State Quarter Design Committee

has come to an end. In a decision that generated great public interest, Gov. Dave Heineman selected Chimney Rock for the commemorative quarter.

I had the honor of serving as a member of a three-person U.S. Department of State delegation to an international elections conference held in April in Vienna, Austria. It provided a unique opportunity to combine my roles regarding elections and international affairs.

My management team has undergone some changes. I appointed Ronald Moravec as chief deputy. He brings a wealth of experience to the office through prior service as Cass County attorney and an assistant Nebraska attorney general. In addition, I promoted Bill Ptacek, head of the Records Management Division, to the role of deputy, joining Deputies Neal Ericksen (Elections) and Deb Pester (Business Services and Licensing).

I value input from Nebraskans and make every effort to keep in touch with citizens across the state. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please feel free to contact me.

Handling of state administrative code undergoes changes

Major changes are underway in how the Secretary of State's Office oversees the state administrative code.

The office has the responsibility of maintaining the administrative code, which consists of rules and regulations adopted by state agencies, and sending updated versions to all county law libraries and other individuals who have purchased a set of the administrative code. This work is done through the office's Rules and Regulations Department.

Secretary of State John Gale thought 2005 was a good time to undertake innovative ways to upgrade the tracking and maintenance of the administrative code.

For the past two decades, every time an amended portion of the adminis-

trative code was filed with the office, the document was recorded in a written log that maintained basic information about the document.

While this log adequately served its tracking function, Gale believed that a new interactive database would provide better information when questions arise regarding specific parts of the administrative code.

The new tracking system that is being developed will have the capability of finding the date of any document that has been filed in the past 20 years and bring a scanned version of the document onto the screen for review. This will allow a person to see the changes in a particular rule or regulation.

Licensing Director Joel Green, with

the assistance of Bess Boesiger and Nikki Gordon, began the daunting task of creating the new system in February.

As the original copies of all the filed rules and regulations were separated out one by one, they were entered into the new system. To achieve the overarching goal of creating a system that would allow the staff to search for a document by various parameters, each document was entered to show the name of the agency, title, chapter, section number, subject matter, date the document was filed and date the document came into effect.

Each entry in the system will be designated a document number that will allow the staff to access the document and print a copy.



Secretary of State John Gale, portraying Cactus Jack, helps school children light a birthday cake at the Statehood Day birthday party held in McCook.

Gale hosts 12 statehood parties

Some 4,000 school children had the opportunity to learn and be entertained during 12 Nebraska Statehood Day birthday parties held throughout the state from Feb. 22 to March 2.

Secretary of State John Gale, the NEBRASKAland Foundation and the Nebraska Humanities Council sponsored the parties.

The students enjoyed musical entertainment, sing-a-longs and people in historical costumes, and had the chance to show off their knowledge of state history. Gale portrayed the character Cactus Jack at all the parties.

The parties were held in Grand Island, Kearney, McCook, Ogallala, Scottsbluff, Chadron, O'Neill, Norfolk, Lincoln, Beatrice, Omaha and Boys Town.

The parties were held in observance of the 138th anniversary of Nebraska becoming a state on March 1, 1867.

Home of Records Management Division is center of dispute

The building that houses the Secretary of State's Records Management Division is at the center of a controversy between the city of Lincoln and Lancaster County.

The city owns the K Street Complex, 440 S. Eighth St., which is used primarily for storage of city, county and state records.

The city has expressed an interest in selling the building, which once housed a power plant, to private developers. The city received letters of interest from four developers by the June 24 deadline.

Lancaster County has opposed the possible sale, citing what it calls serious legal and financial concerns. County

officials have even raised the possibility of using eminent domain to stop a sale to private interests.

Although public buildings are exempt from property taxes, the K Street Complex was given a tax valuation of \$6,069,335 by the Lancaster County Assessor's Office because of the possible sale. The city filed a protest of the tax valuation and is having an independent appraisal done on the building.

The Secretary of State's Office has considered a possible need to move the Records Management Division into new quarters, because the K Street Complex is becoming outdated by new national

storage standards and the division is running out of space at the location.

"We're following developments regarding the building with great interest," Secretary of State John Gale said. "A sale of the building would create an opportunity for us to move and upgrade our space."

The Records Management Division occupies 41,421 square feet in the building. A large portion of the space is devoted to storing paper records for state agencies.

The division assists state and local government agencies in managing the creation, use, storage and disposal of records.

State quarter to feature Chimney Rock

Secretary of State John Gale was on hand for the announcement that Chimney Rock would grace the Nebraska state quarter.

Gale, chairman of the Nebraska State Quarter Design Committee, joined Gov. Dave Heineman at a June 1 news conference in which the governor announced his selection.

"The Chimney Rock design is fitting because the values and heritage of the early pioneers live on in the hearts and minds of Nebraskans in the 21st Century," Gale said. "The design will capture the attention of America."

As chairman of the design committee, Gale oversaw an elaborate process of 21 months that culminated in the selection of the Chimney Rock design. The committee considered some 6,500 designs submitted by the public.

"The committee was able to engage the public to a very large degree," Gale said. "People became passionate about their choices for the quarter, and I think



that interest was good for the state."

Heineman made his selection from four design finalists. The other three were the State Capitol with the inscription "Home of the Unicameral," "The Sower" statue with the inscription "Home of Arbor Day," and Ponca Chief Standing Bear with the state motto, "Equality Before the Law."

The Nebraska quarter is scheduled to be issued to the public in spring 2006.

Capitol Forum provides international education

The Nebraska Capitol Forum on America's Future on March 28 attracted about 85 high school students who heard from members of the congressional delegation and statehouse officeholders.

The annual event, which is sponsored by Secretary of State John Gale and the Nebraska Humanities Council, provides an opportunity for high school students to study and discuss important global issues.

Joining Gale at the State Capitol event were Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy, State Treasurer Ron Ross, and Reps. Tom Osborne and Lee Terry. Sen. Chuck Hagel provided a videotaped message.

"Capitol Forum is a wonderful program in that it allows high school students to learn about international issues, provides a boost to civics education and helps nurture the future leaders of our state," Gale said.

Next year's Capitol Forum is scheduled for March 27, 2006.

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