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Symposium explores Nebraska's international connections

LINCOLN – Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale hosted a foreign affairs symposium Tuesday at the State Capitol that focused on how Nebraska is benefiting from global connections and ways to strengthen the state's international efforts.

The Secretary of State's Foreign Affairs Symposium provided an opportunity for representatives of government, higher education and business to come together to consider the impact of globalization on Nebraska.

Gale hosted the event in his capacity as chief protocol officer for the state for international matters.

"The purpose of the symposium was to encourage the development of a common vision for state government's role in promoting commerce, cultural exchange and educational studies between foreign nations and the state," Gale said. "Hopefully, the symposium also will help educate people in Nebraska on the value and importance of building international connections."

As a result of his duties as chief protocol officer, Gale sees the benefits of Nebraska's international ties.

"I believe that Nebraska can benefit greatly from international connections – be it trade or cultural and educational exchange," Gale said. "Foreign trade and investment is critical to the growth and success of the Nebraska economy."

Gale would like to see the state develop a more proactive plan in the international arena. He listed the following issues as worthy of study:

--An assessment of whether state-sponsored programs dealing with international matters should be subject to a higher level of coordination through an appropriate oversight committee of the Legislature.

--A review of the various international programs and initiatives already in place in state government agencies, institutions of higher education and the private sector in Nebraska. This would help avoid duplication and could be used to better coordinate Nebraska's efforts.

--Consideration of the inclusion of other entities, both public and private, in the international efforts.

--The value of holding regular meetings of state government agencies that deal with international matters.

--Consideration of ways to finance state government representatives abroad to represent the interests of the state.

--Consideration of special incentives or grants to help Nebraska businesses provide goods and services to international markets.

The foreign affairs symposium is a companion event to the Secretary of State's Diplomatic Conference, an Omaha event instituted in 2004. The diplomatic conference is designed to bring foreign diplomats to Nebraska to showcase what the state can offer the international community.

The plan is to hold the symposium and diplomatic conference in alternate years.

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