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Nebraska counties will receive new election equipment

LINCOLN – Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale announced today that a \$10.9 million contract for new election equipment has been finalized that will provide significant improvements in the election system in the state’s 93 counties.

The counties will be provided optical-scanning equipment to count paper ballots and voting equipment designed for people with disabilities.

Gale said the equipment allows the state to make improvements in the election system while still maintaining its traditional use of paper ballots.

“While some states have converted 100 percent to electronic machines for voters to cast ballots, Nebraska has chosen to continue to base its election system on the paper ballot,” Gale said.

“A paper-ballot system has a lot of advantages,” he said. “It’s reliable and cost effective, voters find it easy to use, and the ability to conduct accurate recounts is preserved.”

The contract for the equipment is with Election Systems & Software (ES&S) of Omaha, the world’s largest election-equipment supplier.

The equipment will meet a requirement that the state comply with voting system standards under the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) by Jan. 1, 2006.

“With this contract, we will be near the finish line for Nebraska’s compliance with the numerous HAVA mandates,” Gale said.

“As chief election officer, I am very proud that Nebraska will be one of the first states to complete a new voter registration system and the equipment and disability requirements

under HAVA,” he said. “I believe Nebraska voters will appreciate the improvements as we make elections more accessible and the counting of ballots more accurate.”

Forty-two Nebraska counties have been hand counting ballots, while the rest have been using optical-scanning machines.

That disparity needed to be resolved, Gale said, so all 93 counties will get new optical-scanning equipment to ensure uniformity across the state in the way ballots are counted. Optical-scanning equipment provides a high degree of accuracy, he said.

Thirty-six counties, generally those with fewer than 3,500 registered voters, will get optical-scanning equipment that will be used at the precinct level. The remaining counties will get optical-scanning equipment that will be used at the county election office.

In addition, each polling site in the state will be equipped with an ES&S AutoMARK Voter Assist Terminal. The devices will meet a HAVA requirement that people with disabilities be able to cast an unassisted and private ballot.

The advantage of the ES&S AutoMARK is that it produces a marked paper ballot that can be counted by optical-scanning equipment and easily tallied in a recount.

The state is using federal funds under HAVA to pay for the equipment. No funds from the counties are being used in the purchase.

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