



SECRETARY OF STATE UPDATE

The Honorable John A. Gale

Winter 2006

Counties to get \$10.9 million of election equipment

Nebraska's 93 counties are receiving \$10.9 million in new election equipment that will provide significant improvements in the election system, according to Secretary of State John Gale.

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

The equipment will allow the state to comply with voting-system standards under the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA). The equipment will see its first statewide use during the May 9 primary.

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 cho-

The equipment purchase allows the state to make improvements while still maintaining its traditional use of paper ballots.

sen 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 vendor for the equipment is Election Systems & Software (ES&S) of Omaha, the world's largest election-equipment supplier.

"I believe voters will appreciate the improvements as we make elections more accessible and the counting of ballots more accurate," Gale said.

Forty-two 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.

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 AutoMARK is that it produces a marked paper ballot that can be counted by optical-scanning equipment and easily tallied in a recount.

The cost of the equipment will be paid primarily with federal funds, with limited state matching funds.

Secretary Gale retires historic seal after 138 years of service

A fixture in the Secretary of State's Office since statehood has been a cast-iron seal used to authenticate official documents.

The seal, which is shaped like a lion's head, is getting a well-deserved rest after 138 years of use. It was retired from service last fall by Secretary of State John Gale.

"The amazing lion's-head seal has authenticated tens of thousands of official documents," Gale said.

"However, the passage of time had taken its toll on the seal. The experts we consulted told us it was becoming brittle and in danger of breakage."

Although it has been retired, the seal has not been forgotten. It has been refurbished and is prominently displayed in a glass case in Gale's office.

The state's first Legislature in 1867 authorized the purchase of the lion's-head seal for \$25. The seal's first home was Omaha, which was the Nebraska territorial capital and served as the state



Secretary of State John Gale is shown with the lion's-head seal that was purchased for \$25 and dates back to the time of statehood.

capital until 1868, when the capital was moved to Lincoln.

"It's remarkable that the Secretary

of State's Office has had a working piece of equipment that dates back to the time of statehood," Gale said. "The seal is probably one of the best investments the state has ever made."

As a replacement, Gale purchased a new toggle-hand seal for \$3,560 from the J.P. Cooke Co. of Omaha.

After the replacement seal was delivered in late August, Gale turned again to the J.P. Cooke Co. – this time to repair the lion's-head seal. After 137 years, the seal was returning to Omaha.

The absence of the seal was kept a secret, and it was stored in a fireproof vault while in Omaha. "We didn't want to take the chance that any harm would come to it," Gale said.

In early October, Gale personally drove to Omaha to pick up the repaired seal and return it to Lincoln.

"The trip left me feeling like it was 1868 again," he said. "But I felt it was my personal responsibility to return the seal to its official home."

Office expands search means for certain liens

The Secretary of State's Office has expanded the search capabilities for people looking for non-Uniform Commercial Code liens.

Liens covered include federal and state tax liens, statutory liens, judgments and agricultural production input liens. The expanded search method went into effect Jan. 3.

The office co-mingles UCC and non-UCC liens on a central-filing system. Prior to Jan. 3, searches on the system were limited to exact matches because of strict debtor name filing standards under the UCC.

Under the new system, customers will have more options in searching for non-UCC liens.

Customers will be asked to provide two names for the debtor – one for the exact-match search and a second for a broader search.

The change will not affect searches for UCC liens, which will still be limited to exact matches.

"We decided that our customers would be better served by a broader search method for non-UCC liens to ensure that they are more readily found," Secretary of State John Gale said.

Searches for UCC and non-UCC liens can be done online or by completing forms and submitting them to the office. The search fee is \$4.50 per debtor name.

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Office provides great opportunity to serve

BY JOHN GALE

Dec. 18, 2005, marked my fifth anniversary as secretary of state. The day I assumed office was certainly a significant day in my life, and one I won't forget. As a fifth-generation Nebraskan, I was thrilled to serve my state as a constitutional officer.

When I first became secretary of state, I knew the position represented a great opportunity to provide public service. After serving five years, that great opportunity has not diminished but has actually grown into an even bigger dream of making a difference.

Having enjoyed community service my whole life, I find this position offers countless ways to advance the welfare of Nebraskans.

My office has a myriad of responsibilities – elections, business-registry services, occupational licensing, international relations, records management and youth projects. In addition, I serve on a number of state boards, including the Real Estate Commission, Accountability and Disclosure Commission, Pardons Board, Records Board, Brand Committee and Collection Agency Licensing Board.

As a result, I have the opportunity to serve a large number of Nebraskans in a variety of ways. I also have the chance to shape public policy in these areas.

A key concern for me has been to reduce the tax burden on Nebraska citizens. State tax funds comprised only 11.5 percent of my office's total budget for fiscal year 2004-05, compared to 18.8 percent in fiscal year 2000-01, my first year. The office has increasingly relied on cash funds and revolving funds to operate.

One of the joys of the office is the chance to get to know and learn from Nebraska citizens, whether I'm in my office or traveling throughout the state. Input from citizens has made me a more knowledgeable and effective public official.

I am deeply grateful to Nebraska citizens for the chance to serve as secretary of state. For me, it has been an opportunity of a lifetime.

As we usher in 2006, let us pause to acknowledge the rich blessings and freedoms we enjoy in our country. We pray for advances in peace and goodwill throughout the world.

Best wishes to you and your families for the New Year.

Election conference draws from four states

Participants from Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri learned about emerging election issues at the Midwest Election Officials Conference held Dec. 11-14 in Overland Park, Kan.

Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale and his counterparts in the other three states – Robin Carnahan of Missouri, Chet Culver of Iowa and Ron Thornburgh of Kansas – sponsored the conference, which is held every four years.

The conference attracted about 300 people, including 32 election officials from Nebraska.

Besides providing education on a number of issues, the conference afforded participants an opportunity to network, talk about common issues and



Among the Nebraskans attending the Midwest Election Officials Conference were (from left) Chris Lewis of Adams County, Glenda DeBrie of Buffalo County and Dave Shively of Lancaster County.

enjoy some of the attractions of the Kansas City area, Gale said.

"The feedback I got was that the conference was excellent and well worthwhile," he said. "I was very proud of the event, and it reflected well on the offices of the four secretaries of state."

New voter system up and running

Nebraska has reached a major milestone in elections with the inclusion of all of the state's 93 counties on a statewide voter-registration system, according to Secretary of State John Gale.

Sarpy County became the final county to go live on the computerized system on Nov. 21.

"The new system will revolutionize the way voter registration is done in Nebraska," said Gale, who held a Nov. 29 news conference regarding the system.

Previously, each county in Nebraska maintained its own voter-registration records.

Gale's office spent two years planning the new system, and the conversion of all 93 counties took another five months to complete.

"The conversion from 93 county systems to a centralized system was a massive undertaking by my office and county election officials, considering there are over 1.1 million registered voters in the state," Gale said.

With the new system, Nebraska is in compliance with the federal Help America Vote Act, which requires that each state implement a centralized voter-registration system.

The cost of the \$4 million project includes equipment, software, project



Secretary of State John Gale (left) and Lancaster County Election Commissioner Dave Shively participate in a news conference on the state's new voter-registration system.

services and training. The cost will be paid primarily with federal funds, with limited state matching funds.

Work on the system will continue into 2006 with software improvements. When fully developed, Gale said, the system will allow for uniform maintenance of voting rolls and will provide county election officials with more tools to manage elections.

The vendor for the system is Elections Systems & Software of Omaha, the world's largest election-equipment supplier.

"We are very proud of how far we have come with the new system, and we look forward to building on this wonderful technology well into the future," Gale said.

Symposium explores international issues

Secretary of State John Gale hosted a symposium on Oct. 4 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 about 80 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 of 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 Nebraska," Gale said.

"Hopefully, the symposium also will help educate people in Nebraska on the value and importance of building international connections," he added.

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

The 2006 diplomatic conference is scheduled for Oct. 30-31 at the Omaha Hilton Hotel.

2006 elections to see satellite-voting sites, mail-only precincts

The Secretary of State's Office is working on implementing two new voting procedures for the 2006 elections.

The 2005 Legislature authorized the secretary of state to allow early voting at satellite sites and rural counties to conduct all elections by mail in select precincts.

Secretary of State John Gale said satellite voting will be conducted in Lancaster County as a pilot program to test the concept.

He said the plan is to allow voting at three branch libraries in Lincoln for about two weeks before Election Day.

Any voter living in Lancaster County will be able to vote at any of the three sites. Each site will have equipment that can print a ballot for any precinct in the county.

"Satellite voting is a way to offer more voting options to a busy public," Gale said. "Hopefully, it will boost turnout."

Gale said the mail-only provision is designed for precincts that have few people who are widely dispersed.

Eligible precincts are ones where polling places are not cost effective and it is difficult to find sites that can accommodate disabled voters.

"The provision is not designed to institute mail-only voting in a widespread manner in rural Nebraska," Gale said. "It will be used judiciously."

He said his office is eyeing about 40 precincts to convert to mail-only voting for the 2006 elections.

Gale wins appointment to federal advisory committee

Secretary of State John Gale has been appointed to a federal advisory committee on voting systems.

The 15-member Technical Guidelines Development Committee of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission makes recommendations on guidelines related to voting systems in the United States.

The Election Assistance Commission is a four-member body created by the federal Help America Vote Act of 2002.

K Street building sale wins approval

The Secretary of State's Records Management Division may be looking for a new home as a result of the pending sale of the Lincoln building that houses the division.

The Lincoln City Council approved the sale of the city-owned building at Eighth and K streets on a 5-2 vote on Dec. 19.

Under the deal, Heathrow Development of Lincoln would pay \$5 million for the building as part of its plan to convert the building into condominium housing.

The K Street building, a former power plant, is now used for government offices and as a warehouse for city, Lancaster County and state records.

The sale is contingent upon both the city and developer exploring the project's feasibility during a 180-day period. The city would see how much it would cost to find alternative records-storage space, and the developer would market the housing.

Secretary of State John Gale said

state government took a neutral position before the City Council regarding the sale of the building.

However, he expressed concern about whether the building is adequate to meet the needs of the Records Management Division.

The division is running out of space at the building to store records. In addition, the building doesn't meet voluntary standards for records storage because of inadequate fire suppression, security and climate control.

"A sale of the building would create an opportunity for us to move and upgrade our space," Gale said.

"But the deal has to go through a lot of hoops before it becomes official. We'll just have to wait and see what happens."

The building is leased to the Public Building Commission, which oversees facilities for the city of Lincoln and Lancaster County. The commission has expressed reservations about selling the building.

Nebraska to explore election cooperation

Nebraska has joined Iowa, Kansas and Missouri in agreeing to explore cooperative ways to improve election administration, according to Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale.

One area of interest is the exchange of data from each state's voter-registration system to cross-check for duplicate voter registrations, Gale said. Such duplicates usually arise when people move from one state to another and fail to disclose their previous registrations.

Other areas of cooperation that will be explored include training of election officials, testing of election systems, improvements in election-security processes and uniform protocols for international-election observers.

"It was felt that there could be some real benefits from collaboration among the four states," Gale said.

The cooperative measures were outlined in a memorandum of understanding signed Dec. 11 by the secretaries of state of the four states.

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