

## **JOHN A. GALE**

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### **News Release**

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### **Nebraska election changes fare well in first test**

LINCOLN – Secretary of State John Gale says Nebraska’s major changes in election administration performed very well during the May 9 primary election, the first statewide election for the changes.

The state’s 93 counties were using new voting equipment – optical-scanning machines to count paper ballots and voting machines for people with disabilities – and a new statewide voter-registration system. The voting equipment cost \$10.9 million, and the voter-registration system cost \$4 million.

The changes were made to comply with the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002.

“Considering all the changes, the election went very well with few problems,” said Gale. “Neal Erickson, my election deputy, said it was the smoothest statewide election he has experienced since joining the office in 1995.

“These changes probably represent the most significant changes in election administration in Nebraska in the last 100 years. Despite these challenges, our county election officials did an outstanding job of conducting the May election.”

Paul DeGregorio, chairman of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, visited Nebraska on May 8-9 and gave the state a grade of A for its HAVA compliance and performance, Gale said.

Gale made his comments about the May 9 election in connection with the June 5 meeting of the Nebraska Board of State Canvassers to certify results of the election.

In years past, 42 counties counted ballots by hand, while the rest used optical-scanning machines to count ballots.

That disparity needed to be resolved, so all 93 counties were furnished with new optical-scanning equipment to ensure uniformity across the state in the way ballots are counted.

Gale noted that the optical-scanning machines provide faster and more accurate counts. “Nebraska has used optical-scanning equipment for almost 20 years and has found this equipment to have an error rate of less than 1 percent,” he said.

For the May 9 election, 11 counties had their results completed by 9:30 p.m. (CDT), 1½ hours after the polls closed.

“We had never had such quick results before,” Gale said. “Those 11 counties were first-time users of the optical-scanning equipment and previously would not have completed their results until 11 or 11:30 p.m.”

He noted that as county officials become more familiar with the equipment, results statewide should come in more quickly in future elections.

The state also provided counties with an AutoMARK terminal for each precinct. The machines meet a HAVA requirement that people with disabilities be able to cast an unassisted and private ballot.

The AutoMARK terminals are touch screen and have accessories to accommodate various disabilities. “Our AutoMARK equipment was very well received,” Gale said.

In addition to the new voting equipment, Nebraska has implemented a new statewide voter-registration system as required by HAVA.

The computerized system allows for uniform maintenance of voting rolls and provides county election officials with more tools to manage elections. Previously, each county maintained its own voter-registration records.

The voting equipment and voter-registration system were paid primarily with federal funds. Limited state matching funds also were used.

Gale’s office has been working for more than 3½ years to comply with HAVA. Nebraska was awarded \$18.8 million in federal funds to implement the legislation.

“Many states have struggled mightily to comply with HAVA,” Gale said. “Nebraska has avoided the pitfalls of other states and has successfully implemented HAVA mandates.”