

JOHN A. GALE
Nebraska Secretary of State

P.O. Box 94608
State Capitol, Suite 2300
Lincoln, NE 68509-4608
Phone: (402) 471-2554
Fax: (402) 471-3237
www.sos.state.ne.us

News Release
June 2, 2006

Contact: Neal Erickson
(402) 471-4127, neal.erickson@sos.ne.gov

Gale suggests petition circulator change

LINCOLN – Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale today announced that he will ask the Legislature next year to require that petition circulators be at least 17 years old.

Gale said the request was prompted by a first-hand experience with a 15-year-old circulator while in Omaha during the Memorial Day weekend.

“I was approached by a young man and young woman while visiting the Old Market,” he said, “and they appeared so young that I asked how old they were.” They said they were 15 and 17.

“Although both were very polite and civil, neither circulator had much knowledge of the details of the petitions they were circulating,” Gale said. “Both were using the experience as a way to make money.”

Upon returning to his office after the weekend, Gale could find no statutory provision prohibiting the young people from circulating the petitions.

“Recognizing that these petitions are the first step in making significant changes in our laws, I came to the conclusion that this was not a process that children should be involved with,” he said.

Gale’s suggestion of 17 as a minimum age recognizes that 17-year-olds can be electors and register to vote in Nebraska.

“Although I have been a strong advocate for encouraging our young people to develop an interest in government and voting, I don’t believe that a 12- or 13-year-old can adequately discuss the issues involved in some of these petitions,” he said.

Gale noted that petition circulators are required to read the object statement to prospective signers. He suggested that if people have questions, they should read the text of the proposal before signing.

“As with any document, it’s best to know what you’re signing,” he said.

#