



SECRETARY OF STATE UPDATE

The Honorable John A. Gale

Summer 2006

New election changes fare well in first statewide test

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 a new statewide voter-registration system and new voting equipment – optical-scanning machines to count paper ballots and voting machines for people with disabilities.

“Neal Erickson, my election deputy, said it was the smoothest statewide election he has experienced since joining the office in 1995,” Gale said.

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

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

The May 9 election marked the first time that ballots in all 93 counties were counted using optical-scanning equipment.

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 counties were furnished with new optical-scanning equipment to ensure uniformity across the state.

Gale noted that the optical-scanning machines provide faster and more accurate counts.

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.

The state also provided counties with an AutoMARK terminal for each precinct to assist people with visual impairments and other physical disabilities. The 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. Previously, each county maintained its own voter-registration records.

The voting equipment cost \$10.9 million, and the voter-registration system cost \$4 million.

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

State successfully meets election reform mandates

BY JOHN GALE

When I was appointed Nebraska secretary of state in December 2000, it was a critical time for election administration in the United States.

A month earlier, widespread election problems in Florida threw the tight presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore into disarray. The matter was not resolved until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Bush.

Florida's election troubles would eventually reverberate across the country and reach my doorstep.

The election exposed serious deficiencies in the election system in Florida and other states. There was a thunderous call for major election reform on a national basis.

Congress responded and passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), which President Bush signed into law on Oct. 29, 2002.

Although there was sentiment to federalize the election systems in the United States, Con-



Paul DeGregorio (left), chairman of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, and Secretary of State John Gale visit a Lincoln polling site during the May 9 election. DeGregorio was in Nebraska to observe operations of the election.

Diplomatic conference to showcase Nebraska

An Oct. 30-31 conference in Omaha for diplomatic and consular officials will allow Nebraska to showcase what it has to offer the world.

Secretary of State John Gale is sponsoring the conference at the Omaha Hilton Hotel.

"The purpose of the event is to educate foreign representatives on the progressive and dynamic quality of our state," Gale said. "A priority is to promote Nebraska exports and encourage foreign investment in our state."

Joining the foreign officials at the conference will be Nebraska representatives of agriculture, business, education and government.

Among the featured speakers scheduled are R. James Woolsey, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency; Merlyn Carlson, an undersecretary with the U.S. Department of Agriculture; and Gov. Dave Heineman.

The invitation-only conference opens with an evening reception on Oct. 30. Events on Oct. 31 include a breakfast, a morning program of speakers, a luncheon, afternoon site visits and an evening reception at Joslyn Art Museum.

This is the second time that Gale has sponsored such an event. The inaugural diplomatic conference was held in Omaha in October 2004.

Gale is holding the conference in his role as chief protocol officer of the state for international relations.

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Statehood birthday parties draw 3,500 students

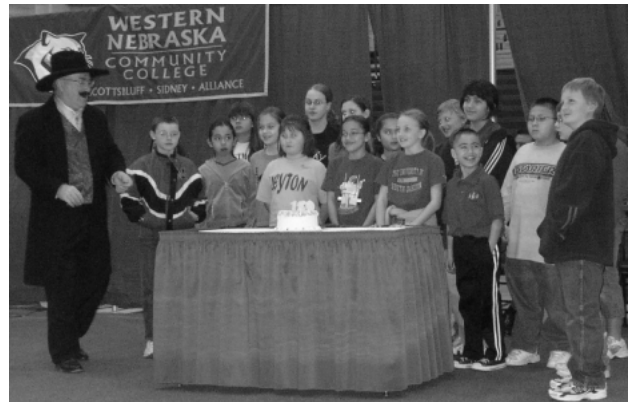
Some 3,500 grade school students attended 10 Nebraska Statehood Day birthday parties from Feb. 27 to March 3 that were hosted by Secretary of State John Gale.

The parties were held in Grand Island, Lincoln, Boys Town, Omaha, Wayne, O'Neill, Chadron, Scottsbluff, McCook and Kearney.

Gale, the NEBRASKALAND Foundation and the Nebraska Humanities Council sponsored the parties.

The parties are part of a broad mission by Gale to provide civics education to the state's youth.

"The aim of the birthday parties is to have fun in an educational setting," he said. "We hope to encourage the stu-



Secretary of State John Gale and students gather around a birthday cake at the Scottsbluff party on Feb. 28. Gale was in costume as the character "Cactus Jack."

dents to develop state pride and become active and engaged citizens throughout their lives."

Participating students enjoyed musical entertainment, sing-a-longs and people in historical costumes.

Election Reform

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gress was convinced to leave election administration in the hands of the states. In HAVA, Congress mandated various reforms and provided federal funds to carry them out.

Even though Nebraska had a good election system at the time, we were obligated to carry out the HAVA mandates.

As chief election officer of the state, I looked at it as an opportunity to take a quality system and make it even better. But I knew implementing HAVA was going to pose tremendous challenges.

We've been working on implementing HAVA for over 3½ years. It's been an arduous task for my Election Division and county election officials. But I'm pleased to report that Nebraska has successfully implemented the central mandates of HAVA.

The May 9 primary election was a key test for our HAVA implementation. It was the first statewide election for key changes we have made – a new statewide voter-registration system, new optical-scanning equipment for all 93

counties to count ballots and new voting machines for people with disabilities.

The election went very smoothly; our changes had passed their first test. The election was a confirmation of the soundness of our election reform plan.

Paul DeGregorio, chairman of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, was in Nebraska on May 8-9 to observe operations in connection with the election. He was very impressed with what he saw and said Nebraska gets an "A" for its efforts in complying with HAVA.

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

Nebraska's election reform efforts were aided greatly by the \$20.2 million in federal funds we received to implement HAVA. But primary credit for our success has to go to county election officials and my Election Division headed by Neal Erickson. I want to thank them for their outstanding work.

I feel confident that we have a first-class election system in place that will serve the needs of our state well into the future.

Programs recognize election workers

It takes some 12,000 workers to staff a statewide election in Nebraska. Secretary of State John Gale wants to make sure those participating in the process are properly recognized.

To do this, Gale has established two recognition programs – one for longtime workers and another for youth workers.

The Poll Worker Hall of Fame, instituted this spring, recognizes those who are active workers and have served a minimum of 20 years.

Upon the nomination of county



Secretary of State John Gale (center) and Nebraska Bankers Association officials Joni Sundquist and George Beattie display a recognition certificate for youth election workers.

election officials, Gale recognized 437 workers. Each honoree received a letter and certificate from Gale.

“These honorees are unsung heroes who perform the hard work of making our elections successful,” he said.

Of those honored, Ellen Rohde of Homer and Eugenia Jeary of Seward are the longest tenured workers. Both women have served for 52 years.

On the youth side, Gale and the Nebraska Bankers Association sponsor a program to encourage youths, ages 14-18, to learn about democracy firsthand by working at elections.

For the May 9 primary election, 201 youths statewide were honored for serving as election workers. Each participant received a recognition certificate from Gale.

As part of the program, the Nebraska Bankers Association awarded \$50 savings bonds to five participants, whose names were selected through drawings.

The youth participants served in 24 counties and worked a total of 920 hours during the May election.

Three lose notary commissions for misconduct

Secretary of State John Gale has permanently revoked the notary public commissions of three individuals for malfeasance.

This is the first time that disciplinary action has been taken against a notary since major revisions in Nebraska’s notary laws went into effect in July 2004.

Prior to the revision, the secretary of state didn’t have the authority to discipline notaries for violations.

“I hope the three cases send a strong signal that my office takes its enforcement role very seriously,” said Gale. “It is crucial to the legal framework of our society that notaries have high performance standards.”

Gale revoked the commissions in decisions handed down in May and June.

In the first case, the notary was asked by a man to notarize a quitclaim deed. After the man presented his Ne-

braska driver’s license for identification, the notary had him sign the deed.

However, the man signed the name of his father on the deed, and the notary acknowledged the signature.

In the second case, it was alleged that the notary on numerous occasions had used a co-worker’s notary stamp and forged the co-worker’s name to various documents. While neither admitting nor denying the allegations, the notary agreed to the permanent revocation.

In the third case, the notary acknowledged a signature of an individual on a real estate deed of trust without the individual personally appearing before the notary and without satisfactory evidence of the identity of the individual.

“With some 31,000 notaries in Nebraska, it is important that the public have high confidence in the actions of our notaries,” Gale said.

Gale tabs Hinzman as office controller

Suzie Hinzman, who has more than 14 years of experience in Nebraska state government, has been named controller of the Secretary of State’s Office.



Hinzman

Hinzman, who started work in June, will be responsible for budget, fiscal reporting and personnel matters.

“Suzie brings a wealth of talent and experience to the position,” Secretary of State John Gale said. “We are delighted that she has joined our management team.”

Before joining the Secretary of State’s Office, Hinzman served as budget and finance manager for the Department of Administrative Services. She also has worked for the Department of Roads and State Auditor’s Office.

Hinzman and her husband, Ron, live in DeWitt.

Capitol Forum explores key international issues

About 100 high school students attended the eighth annual Nebraska Capitol Forum on America’s Future held at the State Capitol on March 27.

The program, sponsored by Secretary of State John Gale and the Nebraska Humanities Council, provides an opportunity for students to study and discuss important global issues.

Joining Gale at the event were Attorney General Jon Bruning and U.S. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry. U.S. Sen. Chuck Hagel participated via video conferencing from Washington, D.C.

“Capitol Forum is becoming more important due to the impact of global events on our lives,” Gale said. “Educating high school students about international matters is crucial to America’s future well-being.”

The students attending the Lincoln event were there as representatives from 21 classes statewide. All students in the classes participated in aspects of the program.

Gale gives friendly advice to community college graduates

Secretary of State John Gale told graduates of Western Nebraska Community College to act boldly and be ever mindful of their obligations to serve their community.

Gale gave the address at the college's May 13 graduation in Scottsbluff.

He told the graduates to think big. "Your opportunities are as broad as our prairie, and as unlimited as our blue Nebraska sky," he said.

He quoted German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe about utilizing the power of boldness: "Whatever you do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

Gale said he has this quote on his desk. "Take it to heart and live it," he said.

He noted that financial considerations are important in life, but he told the graduates to think beyond themselves.

"So I urge you to think about your community obligations and the greater common good," he said. "After all, we are all in the same boat together, whether viewed in terms of local community, state, nation or planet."

Gale said it was important for the graduates to be lifelong learners.

"No matter what your future path is, you need to maintain a healthy appetite for knowledge," he said.

"Many people used to have the same job at the same busi-



Pictured with Secretary of State John Gale (left) at the Western Nebraska Community College graduation are Diana Doyle, interim president, and Timothy Alvarez, dean of student services.

ness for their entire career," he noted. "New statistics show that today you may make four or more changes of careers in a lifetime."

The graduation ceremony included graduates of the college's Scottsbluff, Sidney and Alliance facilities.

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