



SECRETARY OF STATE UPDATE

The Honorable John A. Gale, Nebraska

Winter 2008

Symposium looks at state's varied connections with foreign nations

Secretary of State John Gale hosted a symposium on Oct. 1, 2007, in Lincoln that focused on strengthening Nebraska's international ties.

The Secretary of State's Foreign Affairs Symposium brought together government, education, business, community and foreign representatives to consider and shape Nebraska's commercial, educational and cultural ties with foreign nations.

Some 90 people, including 10 foreign representatives, participated in the half-day event.

Gale hosted the symposium in his capacity as Nebraska's chief protocol officer for international relations.

"Although we have a small population and are located far from our country's coasts, Nebraska takes global matters seriously and does remarkable things in the international field," Gale said. "The symposium was a great showcase for these efforts."

The symposium covered Nebraska's ties to the world through commerce, student exchanges, education partnerships, health care services and community outreach efforts.

In his keynote address at the symposium, Gov. Dave Heineman focused on Nebraska's efforts to expand foreign exports and attract foreign investment to the state.

"One of the most important things to come from the global economy is the opportunity we have to do business in virtually any corner of the world," Heineman said. "I can tell you without a doubt that Nebraska is one of the best places to live, work and grow a business."

Heineman touted the Nebraska Advantage Act, a package of tax incentives designed to encourage capital investment and job creation in the state.

With the act, "we now have the tools in place to compete with our surrounding



Secretary of State John Gale (right) is pictured with Gov. Dave Heineman, who gave the keynote speech at the symposium.

states, across the U.S. and around the world," the governor said. "We wanted to create a business climate that makes Nebraska the preferred location for starting and growing a business."

Since the act went into effect on Jan. 1, 2006, 118 companies have decided to locate or expand in Nebraska with plans to invest more than \$4 billion and create nearly 11,000 jobs, Heineman said.

To compete in the global economy, Nebraska needs to expand not only its export relationships but its efforts to build and strengthen relationships in the fields of education and research, he said.

The symposium also featured Nebraska Congressman Jeff Fortenberry, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, who spoke at the event's luncheon.

"The symposium showed that Nebraska is creating friends all over the world through a variety of international efforts," Gale said. "These friendships will open doors to commercial, educational and cultural opportunities for our state."

Gale said plans are underway for his next major international relations event. The Secretary of State's Diplomatic Conference will be held Sept. 23-24 at the Embassy Suites in Omaha.



Pictured at the symposium's reception (from left) are Prem Paul, vice chancellor for research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Natalie Hahn, president of the Malaika Foundation; and Willem Schiff, consul general of the Netherlands.

Nebraska polling sites getting inspected for disability compliance

Inspection of all 1,495 polling places in Nebraska to determine their accessibility for people with disabilities is nearing completion.

The process is being undertaken by Secretary of State John Gale through the use of an outside contractor, MAJK Properties of Omaha. The firm is being paid \$95,000 for the work through funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"We wanted to get a third party to provide us with a uniform, independent look at polling places in all 93 counties," Gale said.

"We think it is vitally important that all polling sites be accessible to citizens with disabilities," he said.

The inspection work should be finished by February, he said.

Polling places are being inspected for compliance with a number of issues, including hard-surface parking stalls, entry ramps, and thresholds and pull weights on doors.

The Secretary of State's Office will provide each county with an analysis of the inspections of its polling places. The analysis will point out issues that need to be addressed.

In recent years, Gale's office has taken a variety of steps to help counties improve disability access to polling sites through a program funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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Gale's Web site undergoes redesign

Secretary of State John Gale's Web site (www.sos.ne.gov) has a new look.

The redesigned site, which was launched on Aug. 27, 2007, prominently displays all functions of the office on the home page and allows users to quickly access information.

"Changes were made to the site with an eye to making it more user-friendly and visually appealing," Gale said.

Among the new features of the re-



designed site are a "Quick Links" menu, a "What's New" section and the ability to adjust the site to accommodate the needs of people with visual impairments.

The home page includes rotating images of the artistry of the State Capitol.

"The redesigned site fits with my mission to make it easier for people to do busi-

ness with the Secretary of State's Office," Gale said.

Term limits set to sideline 15 senators

Nebraska is facing a second wave of legislative retirements caused by term limits.

For the 2008 election cycle, 15 seats in the Legislature will be open to newcomers as a result of term limits.

The effect of term limits was first felt during the 2006 election cycle when 20 senators were sent to the sidelines.

"We're going to see a lot of interest on both the part of candidates and the public with so many open seats in 2008,"

said Secretary of State John Gale.

"Turning over 35 seats in a 49-seat body in a period of a few years is quite dramatic," he noted.

Among those bowing out in 2008 will be Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, the longest-serving lawmaker in Nebraska history, currently in his 38th year.

Senators are barred from serving more than two consecutive four-year terms as a result of a constitutional amendment approved by voters in 2000.

Ausdemore appointed as Gale's assistant

Leisa Ausdemore of Lincoln is the new administrative assistant/scheduler for Secretary of State John Gale.

She began in the position in November 2007.

Prior to joining Gale's staff, she



Ausdemore

worked for four years for the Lancaster County Medical Society, where she assisted low-income people with their prescription medicine needs.

Ausdemore's background includes working several positions in the Lincoln office of former Congressman Doug Bereuter from 1986 to 1999.

She and her husband, Marlin, have three children – Erica, Michael and Katelyn.

Gale forms Finance/Human Resources Division

Secretary of State John Gale has created a new division to oversee financial and human resource matters.

Suzie Hinzman, who previously served as controller, was appointed in October 2007 as a deputy to head the Finance/Human Resources Division.

Shelley Harrold, who previously served as chief of staff, was named hu-

man resources officer in the division. She will retain her duties as international relations coordinator.

The third person in the division is longtime accountant Jackie Kaspari.

"This new division will give our office the strongest team we have had to coordinate financial and human resources matters," Gale said.

Gale starts program to honor veterans

Secretary of State John Gale is launching a new program for Nebraska schools to honor veterans for their service to the country.

Gale got the idea for the Honor a Veteran program from an annual event at Grand Island's Barr Middle School to commemorate Veterans Day. He has spoken at the event several times.

A unique aspect of the Barr Middle School event is that students are asked to provide the names of relatives or friends who have served in the military. Those nominated can be current or former members (living or deceased) of the military.

The names of those nominated are read at the event. In addition, nominees are invited to attend the event.

The Barr Middle School event has



been spearheaded by teachers Greg Morrow and Jason Weaver.

"I have been so impressed by the event that I want other schools to hold similar events," Gale said. "The event becomes especially meaningful to the students since they have a connection with those veterans being honored."

Working as a co-sponsor with Barr Middle School, Gale's office will provide assistance to interested schools, including a detailed event summary, a speakers bureau and help with arrangements.

Those interested in the program should contact Sharon Hambek at (402) 471-6044.

The new program dovetails with an existing program operated by Gale's office – Vote in Honor of a Veteran.

State wins honors in Web site competition

The state of Nebraska won two honors in a 2007 national Web site competition for state and local governments.

The Center for Digital Government ranked Nebraska.gov, the state portal, as one of the top 10 state government Web sites.

The center also awarded Nebraska an honorable mention for the secretary of

state's tracking system for proposed rules and regulations.

The two honors came in the 2007 Best of Web and Digital Government Achievement Awards.

The tracking system employs an easy-to-use format and follows proposed rules and regulations from the scheduled hearing date until they become effective.

UCC amendments can be filed online

The Secretary of State's Office has expanded its online filing of Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) documents, which record secured interests involving personal property.

UCC amendments can now be filed electronically. Previously, amendments regarding the debtor, secured party and collateral had to be filed with paper records.

Amendments join original filing statements, continuations and terminations as UCC documents that can be filed online. The Secretary of State's Office began accepting amendments online on Dec. 18, 2007.

"The UCC expansion meets two of my goals of office – to increase online services and to make doing business easier in Nebraska," said Secretary of State John Gale.

"Having UCC filings online makes the process quicker, more accurate and cheaper," he said.

He said the online expansion should substantially reduce the amount of paperwork for his office. In 2006, his office recorded 50,617 UCC online filings and 29,375 UCC paper filings.

The expanded use of online UCC filings will benefit filers economically. A paper filing costs \$10 while an electronic filing costs \$8.

Hong Kong delegation



Secretary of State John Gale on Oct. 2, 2007, hosted a three-member delegation from the Hong Kong Economic & Trade Office. Pictured (from left) are Betty Ho, Doris Cheung, Gale and Margaret Fong. The visitors are holding their certificates of honorary Nebraska citizenship.

Gale helps shape election guidelines

Secretary of State John Gale has played a key role in developing updated guidelines for voting systems in the United States.

Gale's involvement comes as a member of the 15-person Technical Guidelines Development Committee, which advises the U.S. Election Commission. The commission is responsible for the testing and certification of voting system hardware and software in the United States.

After deliberations of three years, the committee in August 2007 delivered its 450-page draft of Voluntary Voting System Guidelines to the commission for its consideration.

The guidelines provide a set of specifications and requirements against which voting systems can be tested for basic functionality, accessibility and security. Adoption of the guidelines at the state level is voluntary, but many states require adherence to the guidelines.

"I'm honored that I've had the opportunity to play a part in making sure our election systems maintain high standards of reliability," Gale said.

Election officials give advice



As part of his job overseeing elections, Secretary of State John Gale periodically meets with an advisory committee of county election officials. Pictured at an Aug. 16, 2007, meeting are (from left) Diane Olmer, Platte County; Dale Baker, Hall County; Dave Shively, Lancaster County; Kay Forslund, Sarpy County; Deb Finn, Wayne County; Dave Dowling, Cedar County; Janene Bennett, Otoe County; and Gale.

Four petition efforts are underway in Nebraska

Petition circulators are expected to be out collecting signatures in Nebraska for their causes during the first half of 2008.

As of late December, sponsors had filed paperwork with Secretary of State John Gale regarding four initiative petitions. The sponsors are attempting to gather sufficient signatures of registered voters to place issues on the November ballot.

One effort is a constitutional initiative that would prohibit the state from discriminating or granting preferential treatment on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin regarding employment, education or contracting.

Another effort is a statutory initiative that would permit public power companies to provide telecommunications services.

There are two statutory initiatives regarding annexation.

One would prohibit the annexation of a municipality without a majority vote of its citizens. The other would allow a municipality that had been annexed to detach from the annexing city and reestablish itself.

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