



SECRETARY OF STATE UPDATE

The Honorable John A. Gale of Nebraska

Winter 2009

Nebraska highlighted at diplomatic conference

Nebraska was showcased to diplomatic officials from around the world at the Secretary of State's Diplomatic Conference on Sept. 23-24, 2008, in Omaha.

The conference, hosted by Secretary of State John Gale and the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, highlighted innovative aspects of Nebraska and its economy.

Diplomatic officials from 27 countries joined Nebraska representatives at the conference.

"The conference was a wonderful opportunity for diplomatic officials to visit our state, network with key Nebraska representatives and hear about the exciting opportunities occurring in the state," Gale said.

"A priority of the conference was to promote Nebraska exports and encourage foreign investment in our state," he said, noting that foreign commerce pumps billions of dollars annually into the state's economy.

Gov. Dave Heineman, a keynote speaker at the conference, outlined what makes Nebraska a great investment and a dynamic trading partner.

"Strengthening Nebraska's ties to the international community is a key priority for my administration," he said. "Nebraska recognized long ago that op-

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Among the diplomatic conference's speakers were (from left) Doug Beruter, president of the Asia Foundation; Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey; and Gov. Dave Heineman.

portunities to look beyond our borders would play a key role in our efforts to grow in the 21st century."

Nebraska may be widely known as an agricultural state, but the diversity of its products and trade relations with countries is surprising, the governor said.

"For example, we export to more than 170 countries each year," he said. "Nebraska companies do business in virtually every corner of the world."

In 2007, Nebraska foreign exports amounted to nearly \$4.3 billion, a 17.4 percent increase from the previous year.



Secretary of State John Gale addresses the diplomatic conference in Omaha.

Heineman touted Nebraska as a great place to live, work and grow a business.

"One of the things we are known for is having a strong work ethic," he said. "Nebraska is ranked among the top five in terms of states with the best quality of life and best education climate. A 2007 survey of states' business indexes ranked Nebraska as having the third lowest cost of doing business in the U.S."

Business tax incentives – the Nebraska Advantage and Nebraska Super Advantage programs – allow Nebraska to compete with its surrounding states, across the United States and around the world, Heineman said.

The conference featured a series of sessions highlighting Nebraska in the following areas: finance and insurance, transportation and distribution, agriculture and agribusiness, communications and information technology, cyber security and health care.

Gale held the conference in his role as Nebraska's chief protocol officer for international relations. "This conference was part of my continuing efforts to build strong ties and friendships between Nebraska and the international community," he said.

This is the third time that Gale has sponsored such a conference in Omaha.



Pictured at the closing reception of the diplomatic conference were (from left) Secretary of State John Gale; Virgil Johnson, honorary consul of Norway; Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey; and Mary Rouine and her husband, Martin Rouine, consul general of Ireland.

Death claims Ptacek, records division head

The Secretary of State's Office lost an esteemed veteran manager with the Dec. 19, 2008, death of Bill Ptacek of Lincoln at the age of 60.

Ptacek, deputy secretary of state for records management, died after a long battle with bladder cancer.

Starting as a college intern, he served 39 years in the Records Management Division. He served as director of the division since 1975.

The division assists Nebraska state and local government agencies in managing the creation, use, storage and disposal of records.

Ptacek spent much of his career educating others on the use and benefits of micrographic technology and records management principles.

A University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate, he was active on the state, regional and national levels in several professional organizations in his field. He was on the Nebraska State Historical Records Advisory Board and was a member of First-Plymouth Congregational Church.

A memorial service for Ptacek was held at First-Plymouth on Dec. 29.

His survivors include his wife, Susan; daughter, Emily, Lincoln; daughter and son-in-law, Genevieve and Chad Larson, Nebraska City; mother, Ramona, Denver; sister and brother-in-law, Lynn and Allan Brandt, Castle Rock, Colo.; sister, Leslie Moran, Denver; and granddaughter, Samantha Larson, Nebraska City.

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This is a publication of the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office. Contact the office if you wish to receive the newsletter electronically. Send comments regarding the newsletter to gary.seacrest@sos.ne.gov.

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Electoral College meets



Gov. Dave Heineman and Secretary of State John Gale officiated at the meeting of the Nebraska Electoral College members on Dec. 15, 2008, at the State Capitol. Pictured (from left) are D. Neal Smith of Gering, Patricia Dorwart of Sidney, Norman Riffel of Springfield, Heineman, William Forsee of Bellevue, Charles Thone of Lincoln and Gale. The Nebraska tally was four votes for John McCain and one vote for Barack Obama.

Gale hosts business roundtables in state

Secretary of State John Gale hosted a series of business roundtables throughout Nebraska in an effort to improve the business services provided by his office.

Gale held the meetings in Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney, Columbus, Norfolk, North Platte, Beatrice, Fremont, Gering and Sidney during August, September and October 2008.

"The idea behind the meetings was to learn of any concerns that business people might have and get input on ways that my office can serve them better," he said.

Gale's office provides several im-

portant functions for the business community, including registering business entities and trade names, recording Uniform Commercial Code liens and regulating notary public commissions.

The Internet has allowed his office to better serve businesses across the state by providing services and documents online.

"My office will continue to work toward expanding its online offerings for businesses," Gale said. "The Internet has made my office more accessible, more efficient, more effective and more economical."

Sefrna named office Employee of the Year

Teri Sefrna has been named the Employee of the Year for the Secretary of State's Office.

Sefrna, office manager of the Business Services Division, was honored during state government's employee recognition month during October 2008.

In addition, six employees of the Secretary of State's Office were honored for their length of service during the recognition month.

For the Records Management Division, Cathy Danahy was recognized for 15 years of service and Ernie Butler, Danny Neugebauer, Kim Chau and Mar-



Sefrna

garet Bohy were each recognized for 10 years of service. Neal Erickson of the Elections Division was recognized for 15 years of service.

Sefrna, who has been with the office for 24 years, was cited for her dedicated work, excel-

lent supervision of employees, emphasis on customer service and development of online applications.

Civics forum focuses on college students

Above the main door of the State Capitol is the famous inscription: "The salvation of the state is watchfulness in the citizen."

That was a key message of the Nebraska Civic Engagement Symposium for college students held on Sept. 12, 2008, in Lincoln. The nonpartisan event was sponsored by Secretary of State John Gale and his College Student Advisory Committee.

"We want to encourage college students to be active citizens at all levels," Gale said. "This includes voting, performing community service, becoming community leaders and holding public office."

In advance of the November election, the symposium highlighted the importance of engaging students in the election process.

University of Nebraska President J.B. Milliken, a featured speaker at the symposium, stressed the importance of active civic participation by students.

Nebraska youths help with general election

Even though many were not old enough to vote, Nebraska youths turned out in large numbers to help as election workers during the Nov. 4, 2008, general election.

Secretary of State John Gale and the Nebraska Bankers Association honored 333 youths statewide who worked during the election.

The youths participated in the Youth Election Service (YES), which is designed to increase interest and involvement in the election system among youths ages 14-18.

The number of participants for the 2008 general election was a record for the program, which began in the November 2004 general election. The program operates for the statewide primary and general elections every two years.

YES participants worked over 1,580 hours during the recent election. Each participant received a recognition certificate from Gale.



Members of Secretary of State John Gale's College Student Advisory Committee joined Gov. Dave Heineman at the symposium. Pictured (from left) are Amanda Crook, Adam Morfeld, Heineman, Jordan Gonzales and Connor Holt.

"I can think of few things more important today than for college students – and even more so, college graduates – to become involved in the democratic process," he said.

The symposium also included remarks by Gov. Dave Heineman and panel discussions involving state senators, state constitutional officers, election officials and College Student Advisory Committee members.



Karen Yelden (left) and Angela Nelson of the Nebraska Bankers Association assist Secretary of State John Gale with the drawings of winners of savings bonds.

As part of the program, the Nebraska Bankers Association awarded \$50 savings bonds to 10 participants through drawings.

"Our deep thanks go to these youth workers for their valuable community service," Gale said.

Election turnout sets state record

The Nov. 4, 2008, general election in Nebraska will be remembered for its record turnout and smooth operation, Secretary of State John Gale says.

The presidential election set a record for the number of people voting – 811,923. That beat the previous mark of 792,906 set in the November 2004 election.

The recent election saw 70.2 percent of registered voters cast ballots, compared to 68.3 percent who voted in the November 2004 election.

"It's a credit to Nebraskans and their interest in participatory democracy that we had a record turnout," Gale said.

Another notable factor in the recent election was the high number of early voters – 174,219 or 21.5 percent of the total vote. By comparison, early voting comprised 13.6 percent of the total vote in the November 2004 election.

Overall, the recent Nebraska election went very smoothly and there were no major problems, Gale said.

"That is a credit to the work of our county election officials and our dedicated poll workers," he said.

There were 1,157,345 registered voters for the November 2008 election, down slightly from the number of 1,160,193 for the November 2004 election.

Gale said the drop was not the result of less civic interest. Instead, he attributed the drop to improved maintenance of voter registration lists that culled out duplicate registrations, people who had moved out of state and people who had died.

Gale named to NASS post

Secretary of State John Gale has been selected to the Executive Board of the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) for 2008-09.

As part of his position, Gale will act as liaison with the Notary Public Administrators section of NASS.

Since becoming secretary of state in 2000, Gale has been active in NASS. This is his fourth stint on the Executive Board.

Program gives students election experience

Elementary, middle and high school students in Nebraska last fall got an election experience of their own through Nebraska Student Vote.

The program, sponsored by Secretary of State John Gale and the Omaha World-Herald, offered civics instruction, readership of the World-Herald and a mock election in connection with the November 2008 general election.

The program attracted some 65,800 students statewide.

“This is a premier civics education program that generates excitement among students,” Gale said.

“This program helps teach students some of the basics of government and gives them experience in voting,” he said. “Students who have an opportunity to participate are more likely to become active citizens and lifelong voters.”

In the mock election, students voted

for president and members of the Senate and House of Representatives.

The students favored Democrat Barack Obama over Republican John McCain for president. While mirroring the national outcome, the student vote differed from the results in Nebraska, where McCain won the popular vote.

Erik Chaussee, principal at the Millard School District’s Abbott Elementary School, said the educational program is important because it gets students involved in political issues.

“Not only do they get the feel of voting, but they spend time learning about the candidates,” he said.

The Secretary of State’s Office and the Omaha World-Herald joined together in 1996 to create Nebraska Student Vote to address the need of voter education among Nebraska’s youth.



Business entity reports now can be filed online

For the first time, certain business entities will be able to file required reports online with the Secretary of State’s Office.

Starting Jan. 5, 2009, the office will accept online filings of biennial reports of limited liability companies and annual reports of limited liability partnerships. Payments for the online filings may be made by credit card or electronic check.

“Businesses should enjoy the convenience and ease of filing online,” said Secretary of State John Gale.

Businesses still have the option of filing paper reports.

Gale said online filing has the potential to significantly ease the paperwork handled by his office, noting that Nebraska has about 33,000 limited liability companies and 400 limited liability partnerships.

The plan is to expand the type of reports that can be filed online in future years.

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