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News Release

March 3, 2011

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All-mail special elections drawing better turnouts

LINCOLN – Special elections in Nebraska conducted exclusively by mail are getting considerably higher voter turnout rates than special elections using polling places, according to Secretary of State John Gale.

Of 17 local special elections where officials had the option of using all-mail ballots or polling places in 2010, eight used the all-mail method.

The eight all-mail elections had turnouts that averaged 55.7 percent of registered voters. The nine elections using polling places had turnouts that averaged 36.3 percent.

“The results from 2010 confirm what we have been seeing for several years – that the all-mail method is generating higher turnouts,” Gale said. “Voters enjoy the convenience.”

The all-mail method can be used only to decide special ballot issues. Special elections involving an office vacancy or a recall of an official must use polling places.

Debbie Girard, county clerk for Polk County, is a strong proponent of all-mail special election. Polk County has held three-all mail elections in recent years.

“You get a better turnout and a better educated voter casting a ballot,” Girard said of the all-mail method. “It gives them a chance to see the question and think about it.”

With all all-mail elections, she said, you don’t have concerns about getting to a polling place in poor weather and the tasks of finding and training poll workers.

“I think the most important thing with all-mail elections is that a greater number of voters have a say on the issue,” Gale said. “Greater participation is certainly better for our democracy.”

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