



From the Office of Secretary of State

John Gale

402-471-2554

www.sos.ne.gov

By John Gale
Secretary of State

While Nebraskans are hard-working, independent-minded, and liberty-loving citizens, we nevertheless seem rather lackluster at times about exercising a precious and hard-earned right -- the right to vote. We are now approaching a hotly contested presidential race and a U.S. Senate race in Nebraska. How do we intend to respond?

In the last two presidential elections, Nebraska set records for the number of voters. The 2004 election saw 792,906 voters (68.3% of registered voters), and the 2008 general election topped that with 811,923 voters (70.2% of registered voters).

Will we set a record in the November election? It's hard to tell. I hope so. Nebraska voting numbers are not as encouraging when a presidential race is not on the ballot.

It's never just the federal candidates at the top of the ballot who are impacted by low turnout. Low turnout also affects many races on the ballot for state, county and local elections. Those races matter as well and impact us in a very real way.

With the approach of Veteran's Day on November 11, we are reminded of the monumental sacrifices made by millions of Americans who have served in the military. Their sacrifices have resulted in the freedoms which we enjoy today, one of which includes the right to vote.

Each year, my office encourages Nebraska schools to take part in a program called, “Honor a Veteran”, which celebrates our nation and the veterans who have defended it. As part of those events, the National Guard furnishes Honor Guards where possible, and speakers for the schools.

Not only is this a unique opportunity for the students, it’s an emotional one for the veterans as well. At one such event, a WWII veteran came up and shook my hand with tears in his eyes, and said he had never been so warmly thanked for his service until that day. Yes, that is what he said, “had never before been so warmly thanked”.

So before they can even vote our young people are learning the lesson that – freedom isn’t free. It comes with sacrifice. But what is the lesson for the rest of us? Maybe it’s the same.

The Constitution begins with the thrilling words, “We, The People of the United States of America, in order to form a more perfect Union...” Yes, we are still “The People”. It wasn’t just our forefathers back in 1777.

We should remember what others, generation after generation, have done since then to also ensure our freedom and liberties today; which we enjoy day after day without fear of tomorrow. Should we take those freedoms for granted? Or can we be counted on to be one of “The People” and honor our country’s veterans by casting a ballot in this presidential election?

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