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Mock election completed ahead of Nebraska primary

LINCOLN – The first results for federal and state races during the May 13 primary will be reported at 8 p.m. Central Time (7 p.m. Mountain Time) on the Secretary of State's website: http://www.sos.ne.gov.

The first results released that night will be from the early ballots, cast in person and by mail. After that, results will be added from the ballots cast at the 1,400 polling sites across the state.

"We stress that results reported on election night are still unofficial," said Sec. John Gale. "Even after the election is over, there are still provisional ballots and early voting ballots delivered on Election Day that need to be counted."

A week prior to each election, the Secretary of State's office and the 93 county election officials conduct a test election using fictitious results. "It's an internal procedure we go through for every statewide election," explained Gale.

Nebraska law requires that counties use three independent sets of test ballots to ensure the tabulation equipment reads each ballot correctly. Each county election official fills out ballots for every candidate running in each one of their precincts. The same procedure is followed by another employee in the county election office. The third "test deck" is generated by the election system vendor.

"Each test deck is filled out separately, so the results of each set of test ballots are not the same," said Gale. "After running the test ballots through the tabulation equipment, the counting machine results are compared by hand-counting what was marked, to make sure they are accurate."

Each county transmits the test results to the Secretary of State's reporting system.

"Our office monitors the entire process from the start of the test election until all of the results from each county are in and we are assured there are no problems, which can take several days."

Additionally, the media is also given access to data from the mock election in order to test their own election reporting systems.

Gale noted that this mock election produced an unexpected result. Two candidates reported they were able to access the website that displayed the mock election results.

"Our vendor's website should be secure and it has been in the past. It is not released to the public, only to the county election officials and the media for testing purposes, but no one else."

"It appears that the URL used by the vendor during the 2012 election matched the one for the test election and because of that, when someone searched the web using certain words they were able to pull up the mock results, said Gale."

Gale went on to explain that early voting ballots remain confidential and uncounted until the law allows tabulation to begin the day before the election.

The website holding the mock election results has been cleared out in preparation for Election Day.

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