



From the Office of Secretary of State

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Sec. Gale testifies in support of three election bills

LINCOLN – Saying that his office was prepared to take the next steps toward expanding elections in Nebraska as well as making them more modern and secure, Secretary Gale testified today in support of three bills before the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

The first one would allow the Secretary of State's office to create and maintain a secure online voter registration system. "That system would be available to anyone who has a Nebraska driver's license or state-issued ID card and would permit them to register or update their voter registration through a website or through the Department of Motor Vehicles," said Gale.

Gale said the bill also makes provisions for transmitting those registrations to the appropriate county election officials and allows the Secretary of State's office to obtain the last four digits of a registrant's social security number, driver's license number and signature.

"All of those components are necessary to making this system work and I appreciate the fact that the DMV is onboard with this project," explained Gale. "A number of states are already using online registration or are about to implement it themselves. It's proven to be secure and my office will work hard to insure that the information transmitted to our system is also protected."

Speaking about LB 662, Gale said he recognized that while Nebraska has experienced only rare instances of voter fraud in statewide elections, analysis conducted by his office revealed two key areas where the potential for fraud might exist.

"I do think a government-issued ID is appropriate for the two scenarios described in LB 662."

Gale said those instances include certain first-time registrations submitted by mail and voters who have indicated by written notice to the U.S. Post Office that they have moved in-state or out-of-state, but failed to return a confirmation notice of their change of address with local election officials.

"Ultimately, those people remain on our statewide voter registration database for at least four years as required by federal law. While large numbers are deleted every two years, there is always an average of 100,000 or so who are inactive. However, we have no idea of where they really are unless they register. If they don't re-register at their new location and suddenly show up at their old polling place to vote, we want to make sure they can confirm who they say they are."

Addressing the third bill, LB 663, Gale spoke in favor of expanding special elections conducted by mail and lifting the population limit for counties who wish to utilize all-mail elections in rural precincts.

"Currently, only counties with a population of less than 10,000 can apply to my office to hold elections by mail. However, the larger counties also have rural precincts and would benefit from having all-mail elections instead of requiring voters to go to the polls. In addition to cost-savings, all-mail elections also offer convenience to the voters and have been found to result in higher election participation."

Gale said LB 663 would make all counties eligible for mail in elections in their rural precincts. It would also allow counties to designate mail in elections for candidate issues, as well as economic issues.

"This legislation would expand all-mail special elections to include things like office recalls and vacancies. Until now, mail in balloting has been limited to school bonds, sales tax increases, levy overrides and similar issues."

Gale said that allowing citizens to vote by mail seems to result in increased participation when compared to voting at the polls.

"The more citizens who vote, the more likely you are to have a consensus on issues of local importance. Participation is vital for a vibrant democracy."

Bills 662 and 663 were sponsored by Senator Bob Krist of Omaha. He, along with Senator Heath Mello of Omaha also sponsored LB 661.

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