



From the Office of Secretary of State John A. Gale

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Gale responds to allegations regarding reporting of election test results

LINCOLN – Secretary of State John Gale says allegations by the Nebraska Democratic Party that his office is manipulating election data to favor Republicans are “comic book stuff, outlandish, and science fiction.” Vince Powers, chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party accused Gale and his election staff of posting fake vote totals on an election website, intentionally favoring Republican candidates.

Gale said the accusation is “completely false and Vince Powers knows that.”

“My chief deputy for elections was called by Powers prior to the accusations, who explained the specific purpose of that website and how those numbers are entered into the system,” said Gale.

Prior to each statewide election, including the primary, the Secretary of State’s office in conjunction with all 93 county election officials, holds what is referred to as a mock election. Normally scheduled over several days, counties run test decks (multiple fictional ballots) to ensure their tabulation equipment is reading ballots correctly. The machine vote totals are compared to a hand count of the locally marked ballots. Lastly, the numbers are transmitted to the Secretary of State’s reporting system to ensure they appear correctly for each candidate.

“There is a lot of formatting involved,” explained Gale. “We need to ensure that the numbers inputted by the counties are appearing on our end the same way they are entered. This is done to insure accuracy in the election and in the reporting on Election Day.”

Any errors are resolved with the counties to make sure all machines and computer reports are consistent.

"State statute requires the counties to complete the ballots on their own. Each county election official fills out ballots for every candidate listed on each ballot face within the county. The same procedure is followed by another employee in the county election office. The third set of ballots is generated by the election system vendor, which in this case is Election Systems and Software, located in Omaha," said Gale.

For the 2014 general election there are 5430 ballot faces statewide.

Test decks are filled out separately, with vote counts different for each candidate so that the results from each set are different, Gale said, adding "That is done on purpose. The ballot marking is random and intended to give varying results. We are testing our election reporting system to be sure citizens and candidates get accurate results on election night. It's a public service we provide, not required by law."

That system is secure, with access only granted to the county election offices and to members of the media. Gale explained, "We grant access to the media so they can see if their automated election night reporting systems synch up with ours. It's a courtesy. While the public is not given access to that site, some search engines have been able to access the site. This year in fact, we posted a clear disclaimer on the website, should anyone happen across it, that the data shown was from the test election system."

"Neither Vince Powers nor anyone else other than county election offices and members of the media are given notice of access. I hope this honor system is not being broken," Gale commented.

Gale emphasized that at no time was the Secretary of State's office involved in entering or changing numbers used to test the system. "Most of that happens at the county level," stressed Gale. "Local officials make up their own test ballots."

"My office does not and should not coordinate the test results. If we were to do so, it would not make it much of a test."

The pre-election test is followed by the actual ballot results from Election Day and is then checked by a hand audit of 2 percent of randomly selected precincts following the election.

"It is unfortunate that Democratic Chair Powers would choose to make this a political issue, when it is clearly not so," said Gale. "However, I'm glad to have this opportunity to educate the public about the steps taken by the Secretary of State's office and the county election offices to ensure that Nebraska's election system is accurate, transparent and reliable."

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