



From the Office of Secretary of State

John A. Gale

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*Feel free to use the attached photos in your publication. Photo 1 – Gale administering oath to commissioners. Photo 2 – Left to right (back row) Deanna Frankforter, Grand Island; Barbara Batie, Lexington; Frank LaMere, South Sioux City; Denise Christensen, Kearney; John Strope, Jr., Lincoln. (Front Row) Sec. John Gale, Becky Herian, Alliance; Sara Cook, Peru; Christi Janssen, Omaha; Dora Olivares, Gering; Leann Widhalm, Norfolk; John Zimmer, Lincoln.*

**Nebraska Sesquicentennial Commission holds first meeting**

LINCOLN -- Acting as temporary chairperson, Secretary of State John Gale said he was pleased with the progress made by the Nebraska Sesquicentennial Commission at its first meeting in the State Capitol on September 24.

Gale remarked, "The commission is ready to start coordinating with state agencies, political subdivisions, and other organizations, to be the umbrella group for a multitude of statewide educational and celebrative events for 2017 – Nebraska's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary."

Governor Dave Heineman recently completed his appointment of the 17 commission members, and asked Gale to organize the first meeting of the group. Gale said that Governor Heineman's address to the commission stressed that the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary be a statewide event, that an educational component through the schools must be a priority, and that the commission will be key in the planning and coordination.

After the members in attendance were sworn in, the group heard presentations from the Nebraska State Historical Society, Humanities Nebraska, and the Nebraska 150 Committee. Gale was elected chairperson pro tem pending elections for a chairperson and vice chairperson.

The 17 members, appointed by Governor Heineman, represent communities across the state. Gale said that was one of many things he appreciated about the group. "The fact that they come from communities large and small, from one end of Nebraska to the other ensures that all areas of the state will be included as we move forward with planning events and activities for the official statehood celebration."

One aspect emphasized by both Heineman and Gale was the need for education to play a large role in crafting the sesquicentennial.

"There is a strong component of educators on the commission, and they will certainly be good resources as we consider how to get students and schools involved," said Gale. "Overall, the diversity of the group works to our advantage. We have community volunteers, an activist in Native American affairs, teachers, museum and theater directors, and a law student from UNL. This group really does bring a wealth of experience to the table."

Gale, who is one of the commissioners, said that the next few meetings will focus on organizational issues such as budget, elections, subcommittees, and future meeting plans. "Obviously, we're still in the early stages of getting organized, but I am delighted that we are off to a very good start."

The 150th anniversary of Nebraska's Statehood will occur on March 1, 2017. A list with a brief biography of the appointees is below.

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**Barbara Batie** (Lexington) – Farmer and freelance journalist specializing in agriculture.

**Ann Olsen Bird** (Omaha) – Speech & language pathologist, special education consultant for Nebraska Department of Education.

**Denise Christensen** (Kearney) – Executive Director, Merryman Performing Arts Center.

**Dr. Sara Crook** (Peru) – History/Political Science Professor, Peru State College.

**Nancy Faber** (Elkhorn) – Former principal, Omaha South Magnet School.

**Deanna Frankforter** (Grand Island) – Community leader and volunteer.

**John Gale** (Lincoln) – Secretary of State.

**Becky Herian** (Alliance) – Former teacher at Alliance Public Schools.

**Christi Janssen** (Omaha) – Executive Director at the Durham Museum.

**Donna Kush** (Omaha) – Vice President of Public Affairs-Northern Region at Union Pacific Railroad.

**Frank LaMere** (South Sioux City) – Native American community leader.

**Jamesena Grimes Moore** (Bellevue) – Former Vice-President of United Way.

**Dora Olivares** (Gering) – Gering Junior High School principal.

**Marty Ramirez** (Lincoln) – Retired psychologist and Latino community leader.

**Dr. John L. Strope, Jr.** (Lincoln) – Retired college professor in education administration and law.

**Leann Widhalm** (Norfolk) – Special education teacher, Norfolk Junior High School.

**John F. Zimmer, V** (Lincoln) – University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Law student.