



From the Office of Secretary of State John A. Gale

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Voter registration exceeds expectations; counties busy with early voters

LINCOLN – County election officials are busy with early voting, both by mail and at their offices. Secretary of State John Gale says of counties that have reported totals to his office thus far, 41,938 ballots have been returned or cast in person at county election offices through October 14.

“One of the things we’re anxiously watching is how the percentage of early voting plays into the number of voters who turnout overall,” said Gale. He noted that voter registration has reached 1,198,546 which far exceeded even his expectations.

“Initially, I was hoping for around 1,185,000 registered voters. When the number gets that high, you hope that turnout increases as well. That would be a tremendous milestone in the history of Nebraska elections.”

Gale isn’t the only one talking in terms of milestones. Election Commissioner Wayne Bena said more than 21,000 voters have requested an early voting ballot in Sarpy County. “This presidential election has the potential to break all previous early voting records in my county. In fact, by the end of the week more people will have requested an early voting ballot than voted in the primary election.”

Dave Shively, election commissioner for Lancaster County, reported mailing 22,000 ballots from his office by Monday. Nearly 900 people have appeared in person to vote early. Shively said he expects volume to stay steady. “My staff and I have been extremely busy processing all of the requests and know that we’ll continue to be just as busy in the next three weeks.”

By contrast, Hitchcock County clerk Margaret Pollmann said she has had only three people show up at her office to vote. Many more have stopped by to take a ballot home with them. The majority of early voting has been by mail.

Aside from the presidential and statewide contests, Pollmann said there was plenty to motivate early voting on the local ballot alone. "We have several contested races and a recall question, both of which will likely increase our overall turnout for the general election."

Hall County Election Commissioner Dale Baker said as of Monday, her office had issued 3,000 ballots and that in-office had been very steady. She felt certain that total early voters would surpass 10 percent of all eligible voters in her county.

"Our voter registration increased from 32,000 to 33,000 in the last two weeks," noted Baker. "I'm confident that trend is due to the ease of online voter registration."

Voter registration, both online and by mail will end at the close of business on October 21. If anyone wishes to register after that, they will have to appear in person at the county election office by October 28 at 6:00 p.m.

Gale reminded voters of additional deadlines, with regard to early voting:

- Registered voters can request an early ballot be mailed to them up until the close of business on October 28. Applications are available on the Secretary of State's website at www.sos.ne.gov under the tab Voter Forms.
- Early in-person voting will continue through November 7 at any county election office.
- All early voting ballots must be received by the county election official by the close of polls on November 8. That includes those dropped off in person or mailed.

"That means that voters shouldn't wait if they plan to mail their ballot back," warned Gale. "During the primary election, the U.S. Postal Service cautioned that the volume of mail might cause delays prior to the election. That's certainly to be a factor this time as well."

Gale also reminded by-mail voters to make sure their ballot was placed in the proper envelope, sign the envelope and add the correct postage.

Brian Kruse, Douglas County election commissioner, said a record number of people in his county were choosing to vote early. "The primary reasons seem to be convenience and the ability to research candidates and issues while voting."

Of the total ballots returned by mail and those cast in person, breakdown for the top five counties as reported to the Secretary of State's office on Monday were as follows:

- Douglas County 17,872
- Lancaster County 8,095
- Sarpy County 5,899
- Gage County 1,146
- Hall County 1,066

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