



From the Office of Secretary of State

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Audit of ballots successfully completed for Nebraska primary

LINCOLN – A hand count of ballots in 38 randomly selected precincts across Nebraska verifies that equipment utilized to count ballots is both reliable and accurate, says Secretary of State John Gale. Following each statewide election, a manual audit is conducted for two to three percent of precincts across the state.

The 38 precincts were selected from the total list of precincts across the state, with no more than two precincts from any one county selected. In total, 31 counties were involved in the audit and 6,400 ballots were hand counted out of a total of 296,000 ballots cast. Three contests were selected to be audited – one federal contest, one state contest, and one local contest.

The manual audit results were comparable with those generated by the optical scanning tabulation equipment used in the May primary election. The only discrepancies were found in the counties of Perkins and Harlan, where one vote, on one ballot, in one statewide race in each county was found not to have been read correctly due to light pencil marks.

“This audit highlights the importance of following the instructions and clearly darkening the oval on the ballot,” said Gale. “Over the years, the optical scanning equipment has proven to be a very reliable way to tabulate votes.”

State law requires three independent tests of the optical scanning equipment before it can be used to count ballots. These tests are conducted by three different people who each mark a set of test ballots and compare the results of the machine to what was marked on the ballots. Such a test ensures that the equipment is properly functioning before the election.

Nebraska continues to use paper ballots, which allows for these post-election audits. Although not required by state law, the manual audit verifies that the equipment properly functioned on election day and was not tampered with at any point following the three independent tests. Gale has called for manual audits to review the equipment since 2008.

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