



STATE OF NEBRASKA

ROBERT B. EVNEN
SECRETARY OF STATE

For Release:

Immediate

Contact:

Cindi Allen

402-471-8408

Nebraska Benefits from International Trade Missions

(Op/Ed by Secretary of State Bob Evnen)

Nebraska's international trade missions are valuable tools that bring business and revenue to our state. Governors Heineman, Ricketts, and Pillen have led trade missions worldwide. By state statute, the Secretary of State is also responsible for the international promotion of Nebraska agriculture and the global exchange of education and culture.

Secretary of State John Gale emphasized international business and educational exchange. I took office in 2019. I expanded this work and led targeted international trade missions.

Kenya is an African country on the rise and a leader in Eastern Africa. Kenya's President, William Ruto, visited Nebraska in 2022. Due to a multi-year drought that left millions malnourished and hundreds of thousands of heads of livestock dead due to starvation, President Ruto wanted Nebraska corn and livestock feed. He also was interested in water management, of which Nebraska has great expertise.

During our trade missions, we promoted the sale of corn and livestock feed derived from corn. We have promoted beef from Nebraska virtually everywhere we have traveled. We also promote various other Nebraska business, commercial, and educational interests. The director of the Water for Food program at the University of Nebraska has joined us, as has a major Nebraska irrigation manufacturer.

These trade missions have benefited our state, and the agricultural, business, and educational leaders who have participated have uniformly told me that.

The Nebraska Secretary of State Foundation was founded to support our international efforts. This charitable foundation helps pay for trade mission costs the state cannot pay. I am not an officer or a director of the Foundation, nor do I have any control over its funds.

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The intent was to receive funds from private sources; however, some state funds were also received. My understanding is that none of the state funds were spent on impermissible expenses, as we explained to the state auditor's office in connection with their recent audit of our international trade program. We have suggested that the Foundation consider accepting private funds only and not public funds.

The auditor also expressed concern over travel expenses incurred on our trade mission to Kenya this year. As we explained to his office, we applied for and received a trade mission grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which reimbursed us for these expenses in full compliance with the USDA's rules.

USDA grants are not free money. They allow reimbursement of expenses in compliance with USDA rules to support our work and provide new markets for Nebraska farmers, ranchers, and ag processors.

I am proud of the work of the Nebraska Secretary of State's office, which promotes international trade on behalf of Nebraska farmers and ranchers, businesses, and educational interests.

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