

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

One of the key jobs of Nebraska's Secretary of State centers on running Nebraska's election system.

Last week, Secretary of State John Gale traveled through outstate Nebraska to outline several initiatives on voter registration.

While Nebraska had just five cases of voter fraud of some sort in the 2012 election, Gale believes more can be done to ensure the integrity of voter lists in Nebraska.

Gale doesn't believe photo ID is needed in Nebraska to ensure against voter fraud.

He said 18 states, including the regional states of Colorado, Oklahoma, Utah and Idaho, do not require a photo ID to vote.

Promote voter registration

Gale said his colleagues around the country recognize September as Voter Registration Month.

While September has passed, the campaign continues for the Secretary of State.

Gale said in any election cycle, about 200,000 Nebraskans change voter status. They may have moved, got married or changed their name, for example.

That represents nearly 17 percent of Nebraska's 1.2 million registered voters.

Once those changes occur, the voter's registration is no longer valid, he noted.

As a result, he said he's trying to raise awareness at the local level on re-registering. If a voter has experienced any of those changes, they must re-register in order to vote in the 2014 elections, he said.

Next, Gale wants authorization from the Legislature to allow for on-line voter registration.

Gale said technology has evolved to where the authenticity of a voter can be verified through state databases, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, Bureau of Vital Statistics and the Nebraska Crime Commission.

He believes on-line registration will grow the number of eligible voters in the state.

This method will be more efficient at both the county and state level, as well as generate cost savings, he added.

Voter integrity efforts

Gale said his office is participating in a voter integrity project to prevent possible fraud.

He said they are looking to identify categories of voters where the risk of fraud is higher.

The goal is to enhance the authenticity of each voter registration.

He said there are about 16,000 voters who have registered on their honor due to no license or Social Security number (SS#).

He said their goal is to upgrade those registrations. If the voter still does not have a valid driver's license or SS#, then other means need to be used to verify the registration.

Another tool Gale will ask the Legislature for is access to the national death database. By using just the last four digits of a person's SS#, he said they can cross-reference their list with the national database to eliminate people who have died.

Gale said Nebraska's not overly susceptible to fraud but raising the bar on authenticity will reduce that possibility even further.

Plans to seek re-election

Gale, a Republican, reaffirmed his intention to seek re-election in 2014.

Gale, 72, has served as Secretary of State since 2000. This state office has no term limits. The North Platte native said he remains in good health and is looking forward to running again. At this point, he's not aware of any other candidates seeking the post.