

# THE NEBRASKA UNICAMERAL

Home / News / 2011 Legislative Session

## Around the Rotunda: Mail voting turnout good for special elections

- Story
- Discussion



Around the Rotunda: Mail voting turnout good for special elections

Posted: Friday, March 4, 2011 7:30 am | 1 Comment

Font Size:

Default font size

Larger font size

- 1 retweet
-  Recommend  Be the first of your friends to recommend this.



### Related Stories

- Related: Around the Rotunda: Can Ernie Chambers reheat a soufflé?

### Related Links

- Related: The Session: A Legislature blog
- Related: More state Legislature stories

Mail-in votes are outdrawing those at polling places in Nebraska special elections.

Secretary of State John Gale said Thursday special elections conducted exclusively by mail are getting considerably higher voter turnout than those in which people have to get to the polls.

Last year, eight of 17 local special elections used all-mail ballots. Turnout averaged 55.7 percent of registered voters in those eight elections. It averaged 36.3 percent in the nine elections using polling places.

Special ballot issues are the only ones that can use the all-mail method. Voters must go to the polls for special elections involving

an office vacancy or a recall of an official.

Polk County has held three all-mail elections in recent years.

"You get a better turnout and a better educated voter casting a ballot," Polk County Clerk Debbie Girard said. "It gives them a chance to see the question and think about it."

It's all about convenience, Gale said.

Voters don't have to worry about getting to polling places in bad weather and counties don't have to find and train poll workers.

"The most important thing," Gale said, "is a greater number of voters have a say on the issue."

## **Only 11**

Eleven of the 49 members on the Nebraska Legislature -- about 22 percent -- are women. Since females make up roughly half the population, you'd think that number would be higher.

Nebraska ranks 29th in the nation for the percentage of women lawmakers, according to the Center for American Women and Politics. Colorado ranks first with 40 percent women; South Carolina is last with 9.4 percent.

A glance at the composite photos of members of the Legislature at the Capitol shows a stark lack of women until the mid-1980s or so.

The first composite is from 1937-38. All men. All white.

The first photo showing an elected woman senator is the 1955-56 composite, when Kathleen Foote of Axtell was the lone woman lawmaker. Foote was the first woman elected to the Nebraska Legislature. Others had been appointed.

The first composite where you don't have to struggle to find women senators is 1983-84, when there were six.

A study by the Center for American Women and Politics found that the presence of women lawmakers makes state legislators of both genders likelier to consider how laws affect women, racial and ethnic minority groups and the economically disadvantaged.

The study, titled "Women State Legislators: Past, Present and Future," found that both Democratic and Republican women are more likely than their male counterparts to support liberal or moderate positions on a variety of issues. One of the most striking findings was that Republican women were more likely than Democratic men to work on legislation to help women.

It also found women legislators were more likely than men to favor:

- \* Harsher penalties for hate crimes.
- \* Legally recognized civil unions for gay and lesbian couples.
- \* Laws permitting minors to obtain legal abortions without parental consent.

Women lawmakers were more likely to oppose:

- \* Overturning Roe vs. Wade.
- \* Government-funded school vouchers.
- \* The death penalty.
- \* A constitutional amendment to permit prayer in public schools.

## **Srb was prophetic**

Hugo Srb was right.

Srb, clerk of the Legislature when Nebraska went to a one-house "unicameral" system in 1937, predicted lawmakers in other states would not want to legislate their own jobs out of existence by copying Nebraska's move.

In 1937 alone, attempts in 21 other states to establish one-house legislatures failed.

Over the years, other states have studied Nebraska's system, including California, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, New York, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Texas.

Nebraska still stands alone.

George W. Norris spearheaded the move to a one-house system by trumpeting how it could save money and make government more open.

The numbers in 1937 backed him up. The number of lawmakers went from 133 to 43 in the single house -- a reduction of nearly 70 percent.

The number of committees was cut from 61 to 18, and 581 bills were introduced in 1937 -- about half compared to the last bicameral session. The last two-house session ran 110 days, saw 192 bills passed and cost \$202,593. The first unicameral session ran 98 days, saw 214 bills passed and cost \$103,445.

Reach JoAnne Young at 402-473-7228 or [jyoung@journalstar.com](mailto:jyoung@journalstar.com). Reach Kevin O'Hanlon at 402-473-2682 or [kohanlon@journalstar.com](mailto:kohanlon@journalstar.com).

Copyright 2011 JournalStar.com. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Posted in Unicameral, Govt-and-politics on *Friday, March 4, 2011 7:30 am* Updated: 8:36 pm. | Tags: Legislature, Around The Rotunda, Unicameral, Election, Politics

 Share This Story

Print Email ShareThis

## Other Stories

- Senators debate key economic development bill
- Some senators won't give up on idea of one license plate
- Legislature: BSDC committee will continue
- Don Walton: Here's the census; go figure
- Grand Island mom carried non-viable pregnancy due to law
- Committee hears plan to raise cigarette tax 211 percent
- Lawmakers approve bills on topics ranging from state aid to local government to breastfeeding rights
- Conservatives rally in support of curtailing or ending collective bargaining for public workers

## Sponsored Links

### [2010 Clearance Deals](#)

Save Thousands On A New Car. Dealers Just Cut Prices.  
[www.Reply.com](http://www.Reply.com)

### [SHOCKING\\$25 Car Insurance](#)

Auto Insurers are SCARED you will learn this secret.  
[www.News7BreakingNews.com](http://www.News7BreakingNews.com)

### [C-SPAN Online](#)

Capitol Hill, the White House, and national politics. Online anytime.  
[www.c-span.org](http://www.c-span.org)

