When Nebraska Secretary of State Allen Beermann closes the books on the 1994 elections, it will make an even two dozen regular elections which the gregarious Cornhusker has overseen.

Beermann, who earned his law degree from Creighton in 1965, has spent most of his adult life serving in the office of the Secretary of State. He first served as counsel and administrative assistant in the office after leaving Creighton. Two years later, the Dakota County, Nebraska native was promoted to deputy Secretary of State.

In 1970 Beermann was elected to the constitutional office for the first time. Every four years until his announced retirement last February, Beermann has been re-elected.

The office of Secretary of State is known to most attorneys as the depository of corporate charters. But it is much more than that, including the very substantial role it plays in the election process of Nebraska.

Under state statute, the principal election official is the Secretary of State. In that capacity, Beermann has been charged with transmitting certified ballots to every local election official. He prescribes the form of any ballot and is required to remove from a ballot the name of any candidate who has died before an election.

Beermann’s office is the depository of election results for all state offices. He serves as chief administrative officer for the Board of State Canvassers which has the official job of determining who has been elected to what position, and what constitutional amendments have been passed by the people.

He’s the official who goes out on a limb and predicts the statewide turnout at the polls, a task likened to forecasting the winner of the World Series in April.

Political observers marvel at his uncanny ability to assess every factor affecting voter turnout — from weather to satisfaction with incumbents to volatility of a contest — and say how many voters will turn up at the polling places.

For Beermann, a lifetime interest in elections and public service came naturally. While an undergraduate student at Midland Lutheran College in Fremont, Nebraska, he not only worked as a news-caster for radio station KHUB, but was elected president of the college international relations club. He was a Student Bar Association officer during his Creighton years.

Since moving into the Secretary of State’s office, Beermann has been an inveterate booster of the State of Nebraska. He told the Omaha World-Herald in February when he announced that he would not seek re-election that he had made more than 4,100 speeches and worn out “seven family cars traveling to every single city and village throughout this great state.”

United States Attorney Tom Monaghan of Omaha, a former state chair of the Democratic Central Committee, has worked with Beermann on election matters. He described the gregarious Secretary of State as “Nebraska’s official greeter.”

Beermann has been elected to the NEBRASKAland Foundation Board of Directors. His selling of his home state and the American way of life doesn’t stop at Nebraska’s borders. In 1989, for example, he was the leader of an Election Observation Team sent to the Republic of China.

The one-time farm boy has also been elected to the board of directors of People-to-People International.

But Beermann believes that 1994 is when he should put aside his official responsibilities, and get on with his career in private life.

“It is time to be with my wife and two sons, ages 9 and 13, more than one or two evenings a week,” he has said. Beermann is married to the former Linda Dierking of Nebraska City, a long-time weather...
telecaster in Lincoln.

Creighton Law Professor J. Patrick Green, a classmate of Beermann’s, observed that when the twenty-fifth reunion celebration was held, the Secretary of State was the only one who wanted to go home early “so he could be with his kids.”

“He’s dedicated to those kids,” Green said.

Beermann’s official domain appears repeatedly in the Nebraska statutes. Among the duties of record-keeping which law imposes on the office is the specific charge that “[a]ll public acts, laws and resolutions passed by the Legislature of the state shall be carefully deposited in the office of the Secretary of State.” The elected official is held responsible for the safekeeping of the office and all laws, not to mention the Great Seal of Nebraska.

In the two dozen years of elected officialdom Beermann has amassed myriad awards and has served in many important public service roles.

He has been an executive board member of the Cornhusker Council of the Boy Scouts of America, and has received the prestigious Silver Beaver Award, for instance. He has received the Midland Lutheran College Alumni Achievement Award. His fellow Secretaries of State have given him their Meritorious Service Medallion.

That award from other state officials came about because of Beermann’s deep involvement in the professional activities associated with the offices of State Secretaries throughout the nation. He served as president of the National Association of Secretaries of State in 1976-77.

The National Notary Association gave him its respected Achievement Award in 1985.

Beermann has served as an active member of the Uniform Notary Act Committee and its successor, the Model Notary Act Committee. In June, he paid his last official visit to the National Notary Association, serving as a special moderator for the State Officials’ Roundtable.

In Nebraska, the office of Secretary of State is a constitutional, elected position. Beermann, a Republican, has served alongside seven governors, four of them Democrats.

One of the duties the Constitution of Nebraska assigns to the Secretary of State is membership on the State Pardons Board. Article IV, Section 13, states that the “Governor, Attorney General and Secretary of State, sitting as a board, shall have power to remit fines and forfeitures and to grant respites, reprieves, pardons, or commutations in all cases of conviction for offenses against the laws of the state, except treason and cases of impeachment.”

This responsibility is not just honorific, as Nebraskans were reminded in the summer of 1991 when the Pardons Board was petitioned to commute the death sentence imposed on Harold “Walking Willy” Otey. Otey had been convicted in the 1977 murder of an Omaha woman.

The Board split its vote and Otey sought further judicial review, claiming there had been a denial of due process during the hearing. Beermann had voted to grant the commutation.

Controversy may be part of the daily routine for any Secretary of State, even though the vast majority of the official’s time is spent overseeing the intricate details imposed by law. It was Beermann who was sued this past year in his official capacity as chief election officer when a citizen claimed that initiative elections for the purpose of amending the Constitution required the signatures of ten percent of the actual electorate and not the lower ten percent of the number voting in the most recent Governor’s race.

It was Beermann who was sued — again in his official capacity as election administrator — when a citizen questioned the constitutionality of a statute barring any payment to individuals who circulate petitions calling for initiatives or referendums.

These actions don’t involve any misdeed on the part of Beermann or his staff, of course. It is just that the adversary system demands that some respondent who
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