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LT. GOVERNORS ARE MAKING LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Three lieutenant governors had the opportunity to cast tie-breaking votes in a three-day period in February. This may be the first time in history the opportunity for state senate tie-breaking votes happened so close in succession, according to the National Lieutenant Governors Association.

Between February 25 – 27, 2008, the lieutenant governors of Indiana, Oklahoma, and Virginia had the opportunity to cast tie-breaking votes in their respective state senates. Twenty-three states empower the lieutenant governor to cast tie-breaking votes in the state senates, according to The Book of the States: 2007.

On February 25, 2008, Oklahoma Lt. Governor Jari Askins cast a tie-breaking vote on a bill regarding the reporting of income as it relates to child support. It was the first senate tie-breaker cast in the state since 1959. Former Oklahoma Governor George Nigh said he didn't recall a lieutenant governor casting a tie-breaking vote before or after him, until Askin's vote. On February 27, 2008, Virginia Lt. Governor Bill Bolling cast a tie-breaking vote on a budget amendment regarding funding for Planned Parenthood.

On February 25, 2008, Indiana Lt. Governor Becky Skillman had the opportunity to cast a tie-breaking vote on a senate amendment that was a key piece of the governor's tax reform plan. Skillman did not actually cast the tie-breaking vote. As legislative leaders conferred on the rules governing her vote, staff cleared the voting board. Legislative leaders and chamber attorneys later agreed the lieutenant governor may cast the tie-breaking vote on an amendment by creating a simple majority. The rules require a Constitutional majority to pass a bill, hence, the power applies on passage of a bill only when the lieutenant governor is casting the twenty-sixth vote.

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) noted in 2006 that states are in an era of tightening party control. NLGA Director Julia Hurst noted in The Books of the States: 2007 that if that trend continued, it was likely the power of the lieutenant governor as a tie-breaking vote would grow in stature. On February 26, 2008, a New York special senate election narrowed the Republicans' majority to one seat. Press across the state noted New York Lt. Governor David Paterson is empowered with the tie-breaking in that state.

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