

The Office of Lieutenant Governor: The Competitive Advantage

By Julia Nienaber Hurst

A state with a well-structured, fully utilized office of lieutenant governor is at an advantage in this globally competitive world. Gubernatorial succession is the shared and essential role of all lieutenant governors. Beyond succession, governors, legislators and lieutenant governors may direct the structure and/or duties of the office in a way to leverage the position as a competitive advantage to a state in the global marketplace.

Introduction

The office of lieutenant governor is the most diverse elected office across the states and territories in both structure and duty. This allows the office of lieutenant governor to be utilized to the greatest benefit of a particular state or territory. The office of lieutenant governor offers a clear line of succession, essential to homeland security, emergency planning and response, and continuity of government. Gubernatorial succession is the one common duty of the office of lieutenant governor, but developing the office can bring the position to bear as a competitive advantage on behalf of a state or territory. The competitive strength provided to a state may depend on elements of both the structure and utilization of the position. Both may be shaped by the governor, the legislature, the constitution and/or the person holding the office of lieutenant governor.

Structure

Every lieutenant governor is elected by the people, although the method of election may vary. Some lieutenant governors are elected as a team with the governor in the general election, while others are elected entirely separately from the governor and may be of the opposite party. Regardless of the method of election, every lieutenant governor has the vote of the people who elected them to serve. This endorsement imbues the office of lieutenant governor with the power inherent to elected representation. Additional power is intrinsic as the second-highest ranking official of each state.

Former Florida Lt. Gov. Frank Brogan told the *Sun Sentinel* in September 2013 that in Florida, much of the duty of the position depends on the lieutenant governor's relationship with the governor. In Florida, the governor selects his or her

running mate for the office of lieutenant governor. In other states the lieutenant governor is elected separately from the governor, and may use his or her position as a bully pulpit to highlight alternate positions from the top executive.

In nearly half the states, the lieutenant governor is also president of the state senate. The power provided the role varies by state. In most, the lieutenant governor presides over legislative sessions, decides parliamentary rulings and may cast tie-breaking votes. In some states, such as Texas, the lieutenant governor may assign bills to committee or even the members to committee assignments.

Texas Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst described it this way in a 2014 interview with Sean Hannity: "The governor is ... the general manager, if you will, but the lieutenant governor's job is different from just a speaker. I'm the player/coach that the general manager can't fire—only the voters can. So I come in every four years and I have a chance to move in the senate, where as the player/coach, I pick the starter's lineup and I'm calling the plays to move the state forward. Not just me, but all of us together."

A few states do not afford the second-in-command the title lieutenant governor. This may result in lack of clarity of both the gubernatorial succession role and the significance of the office. In a mobile society, consistent use of the title across the 50 states also provides clarity for voters. And in a global economy, the title provides a consistent frame of international reference. This is a change that can be made in the few remaining states with little to no fiscal impact. In some cases, legislators may simply pass a statutory provision empowering the second-in-command to use the title lieutenant governor.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNORS

Duties

“There is no job description (for Florida lieutenant governor),” Brogan said in the same interview. The responsibilities of a lieutenant governor may be derived from the constitution, the governor, the legislature and/or the lieutenant governor’s personal initiative. The duties vary widely. The Indiana lieutenant governor, for example, has been cited as having 40 duties ranging from heading homeland security and rural affairs to presiding over the senate. The office of lieutenant governor may and arguably should be structured and utilized to contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the state or territory.

Brogan said sometimes the sheer size of the state is reason enough to have a fully utilized second-in-command for the state. “Florida is the fourth largest state, soon to be the third largest,” he said.

In a globally competitive and interconnected world, the office of lieutenant governor may be tapped to lead commissions tackling the toughest governance challenges of the day. The former Illinois lieutenant governor chaired an electric grid commission, while the Missouri lieutenant governor has overseen a commission looking into veterans’ homes. Several lieutenant governors have been tapped to lead efforts regarding protection and expansion of military bases in their states or territories. Other lieutenant governors direct divisions of government based on statute. The Louisiana lieutenant governor, for example, oversees the state Division of Culture, Recreation and Tourism. Others may be tapped as heads of departments by the governor. The Colorado lieutenant governor was appointed by the governor to head the Department of Higher Education, for example.

Lieutenant governors are frequently tapped for economic development roles, from leading tourism to international trade. Many states cite expanded international trade, including attracting international tourists to their state markets, as essential elements of their economic recoveries of the past decade. The North Dakota governor appointed his lieutenant governor as head of the International Trade Commission. Other lieutenant governors work in education and workforce development to support the economy. The Iowa lieutenant governor leads the state’s Science, Technology, Education and Mathematics—also known as STEM—education innovations.

Conclusion

In the global world of the 21st century, the number and complexity of issues faced by states and territories provide both challenge and opportunity to states that may be met by a well-structured and fully utilized office of lieutenant governor. The needs and prospects facing states are as varied as the states themselves. This provides myriad opportunity for governors, legislators and lieutenant governors themselves to shape and develop the office of lieutenant governor to be a competitive advantage to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of states.

About the Author

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