

# Lt. Governors Impact States

By Julia Nienaber Hurst

*A well-structured office of lieutenant governor gives a state a competitive advantage and increases governance efficiency. Thorough succession laws contribute to smooth transitions of governance when needed. Lieutenant governors impact states every day in all issue areas and by leading parts of government. Governors, lieutenant governors and legislators have roles to ensure the office of lieutenant governor is positioned to propel a state forward.*

Lieutenant governors play a vital role in state government beyond gubernatorial succession. Many preside over state senates, lead divisions of government or sit on the governor's cabinets. All are the second-highest ranking official of their state or territory and succeed to governor if the office is vacated.

While roles beyond succession vary, the nation's lieutenant governors directly impact states in profound ways. The design of the office of lieutenant governor—from the method by which a lieutenant governor is elected to the official's portfolio of work—can give a state a competitive advantage and make states more efficient and effective.

## Higher Office

Every lieutenant governor shares one common duty—the responsibility to succeed to governor should a vacancy occur. Federal directives say continuity of government planning, including gubernatorial succession, is an essential security objective for states. Between Jan. 1, 2000, and Dec. 31, 2009, 22 gubernatorial successions occurred. Yet, gaps in succession law exist and can reduce the efficiency of the office of lieutenant governor for a state.

A gubernatorial succession statute should ensure a sufficiently deep and clearly delineated line of succession, clarity on transition resources for successors, a thorough definition of incapacity covering location, physicality, functionality and temporary incapacitation; and congruous succession plans in cases of impeachment and recall. Incapacity may occur when a governor leaves the state, leaves the country, is in a war zone, is unconscious, is too physically ill to perform duties; or is unwilling, unable or ill-advised to perform certain required duties. In 2008, for example, the Illinois state attorney general queried whether former-Gov. Rod Blagojevich should be ruled “temporarily incapacitated” so he could not appoint a U.S. senator after he was arrested for corruption regarding the appointment.

As of March 1, 2015, nine sitting governors had served first as lieutenant governor or as first in line of gubernatorial succession, including the governors of Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah and West Virginia. National Lieutenant Governors Association (NLGA) research shows the office of lieutenant governor has a greater success rate of its occupants becoming governor than any other local, state or Congressional office. In 2010, the University of Virginia Center for Politics found that in the past quarter-century, twice as many lieutenant governors than attorneys general became governor. The office of lieutenant governor is unquestionably a successful springboard to higher office.

## Work Portfolios

In daily service, lieutenant governors impact states and territories in all areas, from economic development and public health to education and inter-governmental affairs. More than half the nation's seconds-in-command have powers in both the legislative and executive branches by presiding over state senates. The office of lieutenant governor may derive duties from the constitution, the governor, the legislature or through personal initiative. This makes the office of lieutenant governor a robust office that can be shaped to advance a state's competitiveness and aid its efficiency and effectiveness. The following is a snapshot of some duties performed by various lieutenant governors.

## Economic Development

By statute, Washington Lt. Gov. Brad Owen chairs the bicameral Legislative Committee on Economic Development and International Relations. The Louisiana lieutenant governor directs the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, industries that account for more than 1 in every 10 jobs in that state. Nevada Lt. Gov. Mark Hutchison chairs the Commission on Tourism, is vice chair of the state board of transportation and is a member of the

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Governor's Office of Economic Development. Several lieutenant governors focus on small business. Rhode Island Lt. Gov. Dan McKee chairs the Small Business Advocacy Council and Oklahoma Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb is the state Small Business Advocate, as designated by the governor. Others promote international trade. For example, Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch led a state mission to China and North Dakota Lt. Gov. Drew Wrigley chairs the state's International Trade Office. All these lieutenant governors have additional duties.

### Public Health

Through personal initiative, Georgia Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle launched the Lieutenant Governor's Healthy Kids Challenge, a public-private partnership enrolling schools to encourage children to make healthy lifestyle decisions. Connecticut Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman chairs the state's health exchange, health information technology efforts and the Governor's Health Cabinet. Michigan Lt. Gov. Brian Calley has chaired the state Mental Health and Wellness Commission and the Mental Health Diversion Council. By statute, Missouri Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder is the state's official Senior Advocate and he serves on the following boards: the Rx Plan Commission, the Personal Independence Commission and the Minority Older Individuals Commission. Kansas Lt. Gov. Jeff Colyer led a transformation of that state's Medicaid system, and in Ohio and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the lieutenant governor is director of the insurance department. All have additional duties.

### Education

Oklahoma Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb led the state Commission on School Security and Iowa Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds co-chairs the Governor's STEM Advisory Council. By statute, the North Carolina lieutenant governor serves on the state Board of Education and the state Board of Community Colleges, while the California lieutenant governor serves as a University of California Regent and as a California State University system trustee. The Colorado lieutenant governor currently also serves as director of the Department of Higher Education. All have additional duties.

### Intergovernmental Affairs

Many lieutenant governors serve in intergovernmental capacities, from being state liaison to military affairs to serving as ombudsman to localities. Alabama Lt. Gov. Kay Ivey chairs the Job Creation and Military Stability Commission and Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. Mike Stack chairs a military base commission. Indiana Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann manages the

Office of Defense Development and South Dakota Lt. Gov. Matt Michels oversees the departments of the Military, Veterans' Affairs and Tribal Relations. Massachusetts Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito serves as the administration's primary liaison to localities and Illinois Lt. Gov. Evelyn Sanguinetti chairs the state Rural Affairs Council. New Mexico Lt. Gov. John Sanchez is statutorily ombudsman for the state, helping constituents with agencies of government. All have additional duties.

This listing of duties is not comprehensive or all encompassing, but rather provides examples of how the office of lieutenant governor may be shaped in each state.

### Election Methods

The method of election of a lieutenant governor may impact the role the office plays. Only five states use an official other than lieutenant governor to succeed the governor. In Arizona, Oregon and Wyoming, the second-in-command is the secretary of state. In Maine and New Hampshire, this official is the senate president. In 2015, legislative measures were advanced in Arizona and Maine to create an office of lieutenant governor. It is possible in most states to change or add the title "lieutenant governor" to the official who is second-in-command. This is the case in Tennessee and West Virginia.

A lieutenant governor may be elected with the governor as a team in the general election or may be elected separately. In some cases, the governor and lieutenant governor are elected separately in the primary and are paired in the general election, sometimes called "an arranged marriage." The method of election may impact how an office of lieutenant governor is structured in a state.

### Conclusion

Lieutenant governors impact states daily from leading senates or divisions of government to all aspects of constituent life, from education and jobs to public health. These roles may be impacted by methods of election, clarity of succession law; and actions taken by governors, legislators and lieutenant governors themselves in shaping portfolios of work. The office of lieutenant governor is unquestionably a springboard to the office of governor and adds to the efficiency of a state or territory.

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### About the Author

**Julia Nienaber Hurst** has more than 20 years of state government experience as a lobbyist, legislative chief of staff and association executive. She is executive director of the National Lieutenant Governors Association, also known as NLGA. See [www.nlga.us](http://www.nlga.us).