

Lieutenant Governors: Significant and Visible

By Julia Hurst

Forty-five states now have an officeholder using the title “lieutenant governor.” The experience and profile of the candidates for the office have grown for two years, and that trend continues in the 2006 elections. The duties of the office are also increasing: USA Today newspaper reported in August 2005 that the office of lieutenant governor is a significant, visible and often controversial office. As the office gains attention, future trends indicate state officials will examine the most effective uses of the office.

Introduction

In the November 2005 elections, New Jersey voters changed the state constitution creating an office of lieutenant governor. The first New Jersey lieutenant governor will be elected on a ticket with the governor in 2009. Forty-three states have a statewide elected lieutenant governor. In Tennessee and West Virginia, the Senate president is first in line of gubernatorial succession and both officeholders are statutorily empowered to use the title “lieutenant governor” in recognition of that vital function. In Arizona, Oregon, and Wyoming, the secretary of state is first in line of gubernatorial succession. In New Hampshire and Maine, the Senate presidents hold that role.

Candidate Qualifications

The office continues to draw experienced and high-profile candidates. Virginia elected Bill Bolling lieutenant governor in 2005. Lieutenant Governor-elect Bill Bolling had served 2½ terms as a state senator, where he chaired the Subcommittee on Health Care. Prior to state service, he was chairman of a County Board of Supervisors and served on regional commissions.

This background in public service is consistent with recent candidates for the office. In 2004, Utah elected Gary Herbert to the office after he served 14 years on County Commission, nine as chairman. The same year, Missourians elected Senate President Peter Kinder as lieutenant governor and Montana elected two-term state Sen. John Bohlinger.

Thirty-two states will hold elections in 2006. At this writing, at least 10 states will elect new lieutenant governors. Among the contenders are high-profile candidates with some celebrity in state government or nationally. For example, Ralph Reed is a candidate for lieutenant governor in Georgia. Named one of the top 10 political newsmakers in the nation by *Newsweek* magazine, Reed is most known for his role as head of the Christian Coalition from 1989–1997.

Likewise, Alabama and South Carolina may have showdowns of famous political families within the states through the office of lieutenant governor. In Alabama, George Wallace Jr., son of an Alabama governor, is expected to face Jim Folsom Jr., son of a two-term Alabama governor, for election to the office of lieutenant governor. In South Carolina, incumbent Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer is being challenged in a primary by Mike Campbell, son of the late and former Gov. Carroll Campbell. In addition, Michael Hollings, son of South Carolina U.S. Sen. Fritz Hollings, is fundraising to run for lieutenant governor.

Job Duties

Perhaps it was the increase in statutory duties in the South Carolina office of lieutenant governor that gained the attention of so many high-profile candidates. In July 2004, the lieutenant governor assumed direction of the State Bureau of Senior Services. The trend to increase duties in the office is traced to the beginning of 2002.

With new homeland security issues on the plate for states, and a downturn in budgets, states and territories looked to do more with less. Several lieutenant governors were tapped to lead homeland security, including those in Nebraska and Indiana. The Indiana lieutenant governor, in fact, has 42 statutory duties and more duties assigned by the governor. The Departments of Commerce and Agriculture, the Office of Tourism Development and the Office of Rural Affairs, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Council, the Housing and Community Development Authority, and the Indiana Energy Group all report to the lieutenant governor in that state. The lieutenant governor also presides over the state Senate.

States continued this trend increasing duties in 2005. In Utah, the lieutenant governor has overseen elections since 1980 when the state voted to abolish the Office of Secretary of State, giving those duties that year to the newly created position of lieutenant

governor. Under current Gov. Jon Huntsman, Lt. Gov. Gary Herbert has retained his elections duties but has also been appointed to lead the administration's efforts in the issue areas of water, transportation, and rural affairs. The lieutenant governor has also been made head of the Utah Homeland Security Executive Board and he sits on the Utah Sports Commission.

Missouri and Montana, like Utah, elected new lieutenant governors who took office in 2005. Missouri Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder retained the statutory duty as "Elder Advocate" for the state and he presides over the state Senate. He also retained the office's membership on the Missouri Tourism Commission, where he was subsequently elected vice-chair, and he chairs the Missouri Senior Rx Commission. The lieutenant governor also serves on eight other commissions. During his 2005 tenure, the lieutenant governor also added duties, becoming chair of the Veterans Affairs Advisory Council and being named a member of the Missouri State Government Review Commission. Likewise, the Montana lieutenant governor broke barriers crossing parties to run on a team ticket with a governor of the opposite party.

"Far from being a ceremonial office, the lieutenant governor often presides as President of the Senate chairs and sits on commissions" and works on major issues, according to the State and Local Government on the Net Web site. This was true of the lieutenant governors of Louisiana and Mississippi who appeared on many national news outlets after Hurricane Katrina. Mississippi Lt. Gov. Amy Tuck is chair of the Joint Legislative Budget Commission and is leading the state's new budget writing process. Louisiana Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu heads tourism, a key component of the economy. He is also exhibiting statewide leadership calling on the governor and New Orleans mayor to merge rebuilding commissions and calling on all officials to support a merge of the area's various levee boards.

Higher Office

Virginia Lt. Gov. Tim Kaine won his bid for governor in November 2005, and, as of this writing, one in every five officials holding the title of "lieutenant governor" is running for higher office in 2006 or 2008. The members are running for governor, U.S. Representative, U.S. Senator, and Insurance Commissioner. Six current Congressmen were once lieutenant governor, as follows: U.S. Rep. Mike Castle of Delaware, U.S. Rep. Butch Otter of Idaho, U.S. Rep. Denny Rehberg of Montana, U.S. Rep. Madeleine Bordallo of Guam, and U.S. Senators Mike DeWine of Ohio and John Kerry of Massachusetts.

Future Trends

"Lieutenants Rise in Rank: States' second in command take on new responsibilities" said a July 24, 2005, *USA Today* headline. "Lieutenant governors, once the fifth wheels of U.S. politics, are playing an increasingly significant, visible and controversial role in state government. Their importance has been underscored six times over the past two years, as governors died or resigned." On August 7, 2005, the *Washington Post* noted, "The job (of lieutenant governor) groomed two of last year's leading Democratic presidential candidates: Sen. John Kerry and former Vermont governor Howard Dean. It helped launch several current governors, including those of Louisiana, Utah, Indiana, Arkansas and Delaware."

With greater attention, high-profile and experienced candidates, and continually growing job duties, the office will come under renewed scrutiny. Part of that scrutiny is likely to result in more job duties as legislators come to the conclusion that the office is an excellent position from which to lead various initiatives. In addition, the nature of the office as successor to governor makes it an office eligible for any topic or issue in state or territorial government.

Legislators and the press are also likely to examine the structure of the office in regard to how to ensure its most effective functioning for the state. Twenty-four lieutenant governors are elected on a team ticket with the governor while 18 are elected statewide separately from the governor. Separate elections can result in the governor and lieutenant governor being of opposite parties. Both methods have strengths. For teams, a strong partnership with the governor is likely to continue while governing. A lieutenant governor may have a role in the budget process, a voice in vetoes, or may lead key policy. If elected separately, the lieutenant governor has the independent strength of statewide election to lead on key issues, sometimes providing an alternate view.

At this writing, consideration of changing the method of election from separate to team was highlighted in Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and South Carolina. In Pennsylvania, legislation passed the House and is pending in the Senate. In South Carolina, at least one candidate for the office in 2006 as part of their platform is endorsing that future elections be team elections.

The conclusion is that the office of lieutenant governor is growing in power and prominence. The candidates seeking the office generally have significant backgrounds. Those in the office are seeking higher office in growing numbers and are succeeding in same. Lieutenant governors received significant

press attention in 2005 both in the course of their duties and for the office. These trends are likely to continue.

About the Author

Julia Hurst is executive director of the National Lieutenant Governors Association. Hurst's nearly 15 years of state government experience include time as chief operating officer of The Council of State Governments, four sessions as a legislative chief of staff, and time as a multistate lobbyist.