



Lieutenant Governors: Quantified as Risen Powers

By Julia Nienaber Hurst

For an office traditionally understudied by academics, 2006 was a year which saw three new reports quantifying the office. Each shows that the office of lieutenant governor is a risen power. Data shows approximately one in every four governors in the nation for the past 100 years once served as lieutenant governor, and no office in the past 25 years had a better success rate of becoming governor. In addition, the office of lieutenant governor was the only statewide elected office to see an increase in real income in the 30-year period ending in 2005.

The office of lieutenant governor is a risen power, a fact demonstrated by research and anecdotal indicators as 2007 began. Three studies released in 2006 quantified the rise of the office of lieutenant governor in relationship to other state offices. A common question in regard to the office had been the success rate of those holding the office in reaching higher office. That question now has an answer. No other local, state or Congressional office has had more success in officeholders becoming governor in the past 25-year period. The use of the powers pursuant to the office in 2006 demonstrated the pivotal role the office can play in policy. And, in 2006, two former governors ran for and won the office of lieutenant governor in their states.

Research Springboard

Nearly 25 percent of the nation's governors first served in the position of lieutenant governor, according to a June 2006 study commissioned by the National Lieutenant Governors Association (NLGA). A 50-state research project looked at the vitae of every governor in the states who served between January 1980 and June 2006. Each governor who once served as lieutenant governor or in the office first in line of gubernatorial succession was noted. In eight states, the official first in line of succession is the senate president or secretary of state and those individuals were treated as lieutenant governors in the study.

In combination with earlier research, this data established that for more than 100 years, about one in every four governors first served as lieutenant governor or first in line of succession. The 1996 publication "Lieutenant Governors: The Office and Its Powers" found that a "significant 23 percent of governors between the years of 1900–1980 served at one point as lieutenant governor." These studies include individuals who reached the office either through succession or election. Additional study would be

required to determine the success rate of these officials in reaching the office through election only or in achieving other higher office such as Congress. As 2007 opens, seven governors will once have served as lieutenant governor, and one lieutenant governor, Mary Fallin of Oklahoma, will join Congress.

In December 2006, a second NLGA study showed the office of lieutenant governor has a greater success rate of its occupants becoming governor than any other local, state or Congressional office, according to researcher Morgan Mundell. In looking at the 25 total previous offices noted in all gubernatorial vitae of those who served between 1980 and 2006, the most prevalent offices previously held by governors were those of state representative, lieutenant governor, and state senator. Analysis showed that 56 of approximately 225 lieutenant governors in the period became governor, while 96 of more than 5,000 statehouse members, adjusted for turnover, became governor. Mundell concluded that for the period, approximately 25 percent of lieutenant governors became governor, while about 1 percent of statehouse members ascended to the office. In this study, only those individuals holding the title lieutenant governor were tallied as such. Additional study would be required to determine a pathway to governor, which included factors such as fundraising ability, name recognition and the like.

Salaries

State Legislator Compensation: A Trend Analysis, published by The Council of State Governments in 2006, showed lieutenant governor was the only statewide official whose real income increased as a national average between 1975 and 2005. The national average real income of governors, secretaries of state, attorneys general and treasurers decreased in the period. The report notes the increase is largely due to salaries in the east region, however other salary actions favorable to this trend in lieutenant governors' salary occurred outside the study window.





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For example, in March 2006, the Utah governor signed House Bill 115 which set the salary of the lieutenant governor at 95 percent of the governor's salary, an increase in compensation. On Feb. 1, 2005, the Delaware lieutenant governor's salary increased 12 percent. It should be noted, however, that the Delaware Compensation Commission actually proposed a 36-percent pay raise, citing the need to pay the official as full-time and at least as much as the auditor and insurance commissioner. The proposed increase was reduced under political pressure. If one were to measure the value of the office by its compensation, these findings, too, would quantify the office of lieutenant governor as a risen power.

Powers

Twenty-five lieutenant governors have the power to preside over the state senate, and 25 have the power to cast tie-breaking roll call votes. While some question the real power of these roles, the result is a lieutenant governor often casts the deciding vote on a state's most controversial issues. Likewise, if one quantifies the effect of parliamentary rulings, the finding can be noteworthy. In 2006, South Carolina Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer campaigned that his Senate rulings had stopped more than \$1.5 billion in proposed new taxes.

In 2007, the Oklahoma Senate is tied for party control. The power-sharing plan vests to Lt. Gov. Jari Askins the power to break a tie vote between the two party pro tems on legislation that comes to the floor for consideration. This is in addition to her usual tie-breaking authority. In Nevada, the Senate partisan split is 10-11. It is likely Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki will have the opportunity to cast a number of tie-breaking votes. And, in Virginia, Lt. Gov. Bill Bolling cast two such votes last session. Having held no election in 2007, the Senate remains the same and an opportunity for further votes is possible.

Looking at recent history, South Carolina Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer cast tie-breaking votes in both 2005 and 2006 to keep tax reform alive in the Senate. In 2005, North Carolina Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue cast the tie-breaking Senate vote to create a state lottery. In 2006, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) noted the states are in an era of party control tightening in record numbers. If the trend continues, these powers of lieutenant governor will grow in stature.

Whether a lieutenant governor has the above-named powers in a state, the role is or can be found in the legislative and policy processes. In 2006, lieutenant governors provided legislative testimony

on bills on energy, education, day care, ethics reform and more. Most initiate legislative packages handled by various legislators. Some, like Utah Lt. Gov. Gary Herbert, testify in Congress. Herbert testified in June 2006 regarding the energy plan and Utah's oil shale and tar sand.

These duties occur while the officeholders maintain their ceremonial and other leadership roles. At the end of 2006, eight of the 42 lieutenant governors led at least one division or department of state government. These included elections in Alaska, tourism in Louisiana and Nevada, transportation in Minnesota, aging in South Carolina, commerce in Ohio, and homeland security in Nebraska. In Indiana, the lieutenant governor holds 42 statutory duties and heads the departments of commerce and agriculture, as well as the divisions of tourism and homeland security.

In both Indiana and New Mexico, the lieutenant governor is tasked with a cross-departmental role which aims to make progress in a policy area deemed critical by the governor. In Indiana, Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman is head of rural affairs, a role which allows her to call meetings of directors of any department which may impact rural communities. For example, the heads of health, education and agriculture could be called together under her leadership to address the rural component of a shared issue. Likewise in New Mexico, Lt. Gov. Diane Denish chairs the Children's Cabinet. Created by the governor, it specifies the participation of 11 other cabinet secretaries to ensure progress in a myriad of measures regarding children.

As noted in the 2002 work of David Winder of Valdosta State University, lieutenant governors also derive policy power from their work on numerous commissions. Missouri Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder sat on or chaired 15 commissions in 2006, while Oklahoma Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin served on 10 commissions. Lieutenant governors in every region of the country partake in commission work ranging from Indian affairs and energy reliability to health care, economic development and emergency management. The president appointed Hawaii Lt. Gov. James Aiona to serve on the National Advisory Commission on Drug Free Communities.

Anecdotal

Pressworthy

In 2006, the press in many states opined on the key roles lieutenant governors now play. In September, the *Herald Tribune* wrote, "In recent years, the (Florida) lieutenant governors have played key





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policy roles in their administrations.” *The Birmingham News* observed May 9, “As the presiding officer of the Alabama Senate, the lieutenant governor has a chance to use his or her official position to advocate for change.” The *Dallas Morning News* in September 2006 reported that many feel the lieutenant governor is the most powerful elective office in the state. In Massachusetts, a September 2006 *Enterprise* headline read, “Pay Attention to Candidates for Lieutenant Governor,” a sentiment echoed by the Ohio Associated Press the same month. Both outlets noted the critical role of the office as a successor to governor. As Greg Johnson of the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* put it Nov. 17, “It’s almost impossible to overstate the power of the speaker of the Tennessee Senate. ... Most importantly, the speaker serves as lieutenant governor and is one tick bite away from being governor.”

Codification

New Jersey will elect its first lieutenant governor in 2009, a move voters approved in November 2005. That will bring to five the number of states without an official using the title lieutenant governor. In West Virginia and Tennessee, the senate president is empowered to use the title in recognition of the vital succession role. For the past two sessions, Arizona has passed bills to change the title of secretary of state to lieutenant governor. Various political pressures and implementation details have stopped the bill from becoming law, however, it seems reasonable to assume this state will continue to pursue that action.

Conclusion

The fact remains the office of lieutenant governor is the most diverse state office in state government. Wide disparities in duties and power exist from the 42 statutory duties given Indiana’s lieutenant governor to the part-time nature of the office in South Dakota. That given, the trends and factors outlined here indicate the office of lieutenant governor will continue to grow in power, number and stature in state government on a national basis. The part-time or ceremonial nature of the office that may once have existed is now seen in a very few states. In July 2005, *USA Today* wrote, “Lieutenant governors, once the fifth wheel of U.S. politics, are playing an increasingly significant, visible and controversial role in state government.”

As states face new challenges in the coming decade, such as the aging population and technology advances, it appears likely that lieutenant governors will be tapped to lead key efforts. The use of lieuten-

ant governors may be innovative in coming years to address cross-cutting issues, such as in Indiana and New Mexico. It also appears likely that lieutenant governors will continue to grow in policy influence and activity.

About the Author

Julia Nienaber Hurst is executive director of the National Lieutenant Governors Association (www.nlga.us). Hurst’s nearly 20 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.