



December 5, 2006

## **ANALYSIS: GOVERNORS AND PAST ELECTED OFFICES (1980 – 2006)**

### **PROJECT**

In November of 2006, the National Lieutenant Governors Association (NLGA) conducted a 50-state research project to review the biographical background of the governors of each state for the past 26 years. The purpose of the research was to review past elected offices of individuals who have served as governor of their state over the past 26 years. An analysis of data was done to determine which previous elected offices were most prevalent in governors' backgrounds, and to further determine if regional variation in the data existed.

### **BACKGROUND**

Research included internet inquiries and discussions with state librarians and officials in secretary of state offices. Staff representatives of several current lieutenant governors were contacted to provide lists by name of those who previously served as lieutenant governor. This information was compiled and cross referenced with established lists of past governors, as well as with their vitae.

It is noted that historical information compiled may not include every office held by governors. Research was conducted via the internet and email communication with various state government staffs. While recent governors are more likely to utilize the internet as a communications means, governors from the beginning period of this study (1980 – 1990) were less likely to do so and their overall information was more disperse. Every effort was made to locate all historical information possible utilizing electronic means; however the author acknowledges some information, specifically offices at the municipal or county level, may be missing.

Upon initial compilation of past elected offices found in gubernatorial vitas, the following is a complete list of all past offices included in this study: Agriculture Commissioner, Attorney General, City Commissioner, City Council, Comptroller, County Auditor, County Commission, County Council, County Executive, County Judge, District Attorney, Executive Councilor, Insurance Commissioner, Lieutenant Governor, Mayor, Prosecuting Attorney, PSC, Secretary of State (SOS), State Auditor, State House, State Senate, State Treasurer, Town Administrator, US House, and US Senate. It is noted that wide variations in local and state practices mean some of these offices may not be elected in a given area. Each of these offices is included to conduct the most thorough examination possible, without regard to eliminating some based on electoral or other method.

This research is a follow up to the June 2006 paper entitled “ANALYSIS: GOVERNORS WHO ONCE SERVED AS LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR (1980 – 2006)” (*see the NLGA website at [www.nlga.com](http://www.nlga.com)*). It is noted that in the previous study, all officials who were first in line of gubernatorial succession were tallied as a lieutenant governor. In this study, each official is tallied according to their title for the most accurate possible study. As a result, one will see a difference in the number of ‘lieutenant governors’ becoming governor.

## FINDINGS

For United States governors serving between the years 1980 – 2006, the findings show the most prevalent elected offices previously held were those of State House, Lieutenant Governor and State Senate. This research does not, however, establish a statistical correlation between having served in these offices and becoming Governor, nor is it able to provide a probability of serving in one of these offices and becoming Governor.

That stated, the assumption can be made that those holding the office of lieutenant governor have the greatest success rate to become governor of any other elected office. The only elected office which appears more often, in total, in the backgrounds of governors in the period studied is the office of state representative. Currently there are 5,411<sup>[1]</sup> legislators in all 50 states, and only 42 lieutenant governors. There have been roughly 225 people who have served in the office of lieutenant governor in the past twenty years, 25% of whom would go on to become Governor. If one were to assume there was 21% turnover<sup>[2]</sup> in the state house chamber in the period, then less than 1% of state House members would eventually become Governor. While these percentages are estimated, in reviewing the raw numbers, one can infer that lieutenant governors most likely become governor on a larger percentage basis than any other elected office.

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>Office</b>	<b>Count</b>
Agriculture Commissioner	1
Attorney General	24
City Commissioner	1
City Council	11
Comptroller	1
County Auditor	1
County Commission	2
County Council	8
County Executive	3
County Judge	1
District Attorney	2
Executive Councilor	1
Insurance Commissioner	1
Lieutenant Governor	56
Mayor	19
Prosecuting Attorney	2

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>Office</b>	<b>Count</b>
PSC	1
SOS	16
State Auditor	6
State House	96
State Senate	53
State Treasurer	11
Town Administrator	1
US House	28
US Senate	4

These findings are consistent with a study completed in 1996 which looked at how many governors between the years 1900- 1980 had previously served as lieutenant governor. In “Lieutenant Governors: The Office and its Powers,” researcher Randall Fine, a Harvard University student, determined that a “significant 23% of governors (in that period) served at one point as lieutenant governor (p.44).” These two research projects demonstrate that for more than 100 years, it has remained consistent that nearly one in every four governors once served as lieutenant governor. Further, the percentage of governors with this background has increased somewhat over the past quarter- century.

**REGIONAL ANALYSIS**

The National Lieutenant Governors Association (NLGA) recognizes regional groups as reflected in its Board of Directors structure. Table 2 lists the states by region.

**Table 2 – States by Region**

<b>East Region</b>	Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont
<b>Midwest Region</b>	Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin
<b>South Region</b>	Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia
<b>West Region</b>	Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming

The findings here for the years 1980 – 2006 were further analyzed by region to determine if this relationship was more prevalent in one part of the country more than another. Table 3 shows that all regions consistently show the same offices as being a stepping stone on the path to sitting in the governor’s chair. Those offices are State House, Lieutenant Governor and State Senate over the past 25 years.

**Table 3**

Region	Office	Count
<b>South</b>	State House	29
	Lieutenant Governor	19
	State Senate	16
	US House	12
	Attorney General	8
Region	Office	Count
<b>Midwest</b>	State House	21
	Lieutenant Governor	14
	State Senate	11
	Mayor	6
	SOS	6
Region	Office	Count
<b>East</b>	State House	22
	State Senate	13
	Lieutenant Governor	12
	US House	10
	City Council	6
Region	Office	Count
<b>West</b>	State House	24
	State Senate	13
	Lieutenant Governor	11
	Attorney General	9
	Mayor	6

Again it is noted, one cannot conclude that the likelihood of an individual who is a State House member becoming governor is greater than that of other elected offices. These are raw numbers. To calculate the probability of one being a State House member and then becoming a Governor, one must know the total number of individuals who had served in all fifty state legislatures for the past 25 years. This study did not attempt to do that. It should also be noted that having served in one office is not mutually exclusive of another. One governor could have served in the State House and been a Lieutenant Governor before becoming Governor. Therefore, that individual would have been counted twice in Table 3. Of the fifty-six (56) individuals who were at one time Lieutenant Governor, twenty-seven (27) of them served in the State House at some point in their political career. Seventeen (17) of the fifty-six (56) served in the State Senate at some point. Only five (5) of the 56 lieutenant governors who went on to become Governor served in both the State House and State Senate.

*For more information, contact NLGA Director Julia Hurst (859) 283-1400 or visit [www.nlga.us](http://www.nlga.us).*

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<sup>[1]</sup> Source: NCSL - <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/legman/about/numoflegis.htm>

<sup>[2]</sup> Source: NCSL - <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/legman/elect/hsetrn.htm>