

The growing role of lieutenant governor

Leading today, preparing for tomorrow

BY JULIA NIENABER HURST

At any moment, one of the 50 lieutenant governors could become governor. In January 2003, eight of the sitting governors were once lieutenant governors.

Most people are familiar with the lieutenant governor as the officeholder who succeeds to the office of governor should it become vacant. But the role of lieutenant governor is growing.

With fiscal crises grasping the states and new issues such as homeland security looming, lieutenant governors are stepping up to lead in vital areas, a move recognized perhaps as high as the White House, where lieutenant governors received a briefing from key officials in February.

The National Lieutenant Governors Association recognizes the state officeholder first in line of succession as “lieutenant governor.” In 42 states this is the office of lieutenant governor; in three, it is the secretary of state; and in five, it is the senate president.

The growing leadership role

Lieutenant governors currently preside over 20 state senates. They also lead at least seven states’ commerce or tourism operations, five elections divisions, and two transportation authorities. Lieutenant governors in Indiana, Missouri, Nevada, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Kansas and Ohio lead tourism authorities or head the state’s commerce or tourism department. NLGA members in Arizona, Utah, Oregon,



The lieutenant governors at the Canadian Embassy. Row 1: Lt. Gov. Catherine Baker Knoll (Pa.), Secretary of State Jan Brewer (Ariz.), Lt. Govs. Olene Walker (Utah), Loren Leman (Alaska), Mary Fallin (Okla.), and John Carney (Del.). Row 2: Brian Dubie (Vt.) Charles J. Fogarty (R.I.), Dep. Head of Embassy Bertin Cote, Stephen Henry, M.D. (Ky.), Jack Dalrymple (N.D.). Row 3: Karl Ohs (Mont.), Vargrave Richards (Virgin Islands), Barbara Lawton (Wis.), Jim Risch (Idaho), Andre Bauer (S.C.) and Patrick Quinn (Ill.).

Alaska and Wyoming oversee elections. For the first time, Minnesota’s lieutenant governor is head of the transportation department.

Lieutenant governors hold more than 20 other key leadership positions in the fields of public safety and emergency management, economic development, health care, agriculture and the environment.

During the February NLGA meeting in Washington, D.C., lieutenant governors met with U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge and Office of Management and Budget Director Mitch Daniels at the White House. In a visit that lasted nearly two hours, lieutenant governors engaged in candid conversations about military action in the Middle East, homeland security and the current fiscal outlooks for the nation and the states.

Policy roles

Rhode Island Lt. Gov. Charles J. Fogarty, NLGA chairman, is working to help keep the position an active, policy-driven and results-orientated office nationwide. “Lieutenant governors across the country are playing an increasingly greater role in addressing major issues of concern to their constituents,” Fogarty said. “In Rhode Island, I’ve used the position to take on prescription drug prices, overhaul our long-term-care system, bolster the state’s emergency management capabilities, expand mental health care coverage and focus on small business issues.”

Alaska’s lieutenant governor, Loren Leman, is working with colleagues on the policy issues surrounding the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. “I have talked about the importance to our state – and the

economy and security of our entire country – of access to the Coastal Plain of ANWR. Unfortunately, many people outside Alaska do not understand the importance of this area to our nation’s energy independence. The U.S. Senate’s recent vote reflects this. We in Alaska are environmentalists in the true sense of the word and we will continue to work to open this area to oil and gas development, while preserving the values of our beautiful state,” he said.

In Nebraska, Lt. Gov. Dave Heineman directs the state’s homeland security operations. “Serving as director of homeland security is challenging, critical and very important,” said Heineman. “Keeping this mission at the highest level of state government, with the lieutenant governor, allows us to have a comprehensive strategic view of homeland security rather than a fragmented departmental view. More issues could be tackled at this comprehensive level through the office of lieutenant governor.”

Economic development roles

Lieutenant governors have taken a particularly active role in contributing to economic development. In addition to leading more than seven different types of commerce authorities in the states, the officials take every opportunity to promote their states and work on trade and tourism.

As part of the February NLGA meeting, the Canadian Embassy hosted the lieutenant governors for discussions on economic development. At the gathering, officials discussed the fact that 37 states have Canada as their leading export market and, in 2001, U.S. transactions with Canada reached an average of \$1.2 billion per day.

Yet, state budget gaps grew by 50 percent in December 2002 and January 2003, even though state policy-makers already addressed a \$49.1 billion shortfall in fiscal year 2003 budgets, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Tourism downturns contribute to the problem. “Our states’ tourism industries continue to suffer from the devastating aftereffects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and it is essential ... we revitalize the national tourism industry,” said Missouri Lt. Gov. Joe Maxwell, who serves as vice chairman for his state’s tourism commission.

“I cannot emphasize enough the importance of tourism to our state’s economy, which can be affected by potential war, terrorism and changes in the economy,” said Nevada Lt. Gov. Lorraine Hunt, who, by state statute, serves as chair of Nevada’s Commission on Tourism. “I believe that lieutenant governors in their individual states can take the lead in promoting tourism, which is both economically beneficial and resource friendly.”

To that end, Hunt presented a resolution at NLGA’s February meeting to encourage growth in tourism. The resolution, which passed, seeks support in increasing state and federal tourism dollars through a matching program that would benefit all states. It also addresses the American Travel Promotion Act, stalled in Congress last year, which this year became part of the U.S. Senate Omnibus Appropriations.

Other lieutenant governors with leadership roles in tourism include Lt. Gov. John Moore, head of the Kansas Travel and Tourism Division, and Lt. Gov. Kathleen Blanco, head of the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

How private sector sees the role

The private sector, too, sees lieutenant governors as a growing force in finding solutions to states’ growing concerns.

“States face increasing demands in water and transportation infrastructure needs, but adequate funding from the federal government appears unlikely as reported by the National Council for Public-Private Partnerships at NLGA’s February meeting,” said Chip Foley of the Steel Recycling Institute. “Private sector

resources can be part of the answer through facilitation of public-private partnerships and lieutenant governors are in a unique position to initiate those.”

In order for lieutenant governors to play an active role, and for more lieutenant governors to later be elected governor, John Della Volpe of SDS research says they need to “talk with their governors to express an interest in succeeding them – work to develop a plan that will help the lieutenant governor exercise independence and promote their own identity, while still remaining a loyal lieutenant governor, and be creative to continue developing issues, projects and leadership of their own.”

Interacting with this growing force

Each February, NLGA meets in Washington, D.C. The focus is on federal-state relations. At this meeting and the annual meeting, policy resolutions are considered for endorsement by all lieutenant governors. NLGA meetings are open venues where those interested in state government can attend and work with lieutenant governors on issues.

This year’s annual meeting will be held July 15-19 in Little Rock, Ark. The meeting theme – “Building for a Better Tomorrow, Today” – matches the growing role of the office. The program will highlight economic development and education. Events include a question and answer discussion on the nation’s growing water challenges and a national-level briefing on congressional action and presidential initiatives.

In 2004, the annual meeting will move to the West. Montana Lt. Gov. Karl Ohs says, “I’m excited to host the 2004 NLGA Annual Meeting in Big Sky, Montana. Montana’s spirit of the Old West should help us address the matters states face today while showing colleagues nationwide first-hand the unique attributes of the Western region.” This meeting will continue to focus on the growing role of the office while assisting in the continuing professional development of these key state officials. ★



Chip Foley of the Steel Recycling Institute talks with Lt. Gov. Charles Fogarty (R.I.)

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