

TIME TO ABOLISH USELESS POSITION OF LT. GOVERNOR

Contributed by Jeff Crouere
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Louisiana state government is filled with unneeded positions that only add to our bloated budget. One perfect example is the office of Lt. Governor. Maybe in good economic times, such a ceremonial position can be justified, but not today.

For years, budget reformers have recommended the elimination of this unnecessary position. Now advocates for streamlined government are getting support from Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, who broached the subject last week.

Clearly, this is one of the Governor's best ideas. The office of Lt. Governor has very limited duties and is needless in our state government. Several years ago, the state eliminated the position of Elections Commissioner. The duties of that office were assumed by the Secretary of State's office and the state of Louisiana did not suffer at all. Similarly, we would survive if we eliminated the Lt. Governor position and the scant duties of that office were assumed by another state office holder.

To abolish the position, the Louisiana Legislature will have to pass a bill with a two-thirds majority. In preparation for the upcoming session, State Representative Cameron Henry (R-Metairie) is working on legislation which would shut down the entire office of Lt. Governor and divide the few real duties of the position among other state departments. Henry claims that there is strong support from both Democratic and Republican legislators for his bill, which will save taxpayers about \$10.5 million per year. The position comes with a big salary, a big staff, and a myriad of costly vehicles and offices.

If the bill passes, the issue will go before the voters of Louisiana. Since it will involve an amendment to the state constitution, it will require the approval of the voters. There is little doubt that a strong majority of voters support abolishing the office of Lt. Governor. For example, in an on-line poll at www.lanewslink.com, 73% of respondents supported the elimination of the office.

If the duties of Lt. Governor are so important, how can Mitch Landrieu take a leave of absence every few years to run for Mayor of New Orleans? Landrieu has used the office as a platform to campaign for the job he really covets. While Landrieu has not embarrassed the state and has seemingly done a decent job, most tourism officials cannot point to any concrete accomplishments during his tenure. When I asked one local hotel executive what Landrieu had done as Lt. Governor, he said, "I really don't know."

After this mayor's race, it will be a perfect opportunity to consolidate state government and reduce an unnecessary office. It will not only save taxpayer money, but it will give politicians once less office to use as a stepping stone to another position.

While Governor Jindal has expressed interest in abolishing the position, a host of other politicians are lining up to run for the office in the next election. The motivation, of course, is that Bobby Jindal may vacate the Governor's office early. There is rampant speculation that Jindal may be included in the 2012 GOP ticket as either a presidential or vice-presidential nominee.

So, it seems the only real duty of this position to wait for the Governor to leave the state or vacate the office. By eliminating the position, the state would be moving, albeit in a small direction, toward more efficient government. It is a good idea, as other states have eliminated the position, so let's follow their lead.

In this day and age, when budget deficits are out of control, we need to eliminate any and all superfluous positions in state government and save money for the abused taxpayers. Let's start by getting rid of the office of Lt. Governor.