

THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF TEXAS MORE POWERFUL THAN THE GOVERNOR

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If I were to ask you to name the most powerful governmental position at the state level in Texas, chances are you'd say, 'The Governor.' And, in most states, you'd be correct. However, in Texas, that's not the case. In the Lone Star State, the Lieutenant Governor is a more powerful government official than the Governor. But how? And why?



THE POWERS

As outlined in Article IV of the Texas Constitution, the Governor is the Chief Executive Officer of the State, Commander-In-Chief of Military Forces, and may convene the Legislature in the case of a public enemy or disease threat. He or she may also approve, or veto orders, resolutions, or votes made by the Legislature.

On the other hand, the Lieutenant Governor is considered the President of the Senate, which has the right to debate and vote on all questions and s/he has the deciding vote in the case of a tie. The process is similar to the role the served by the Vice President of the United States in the U.S. Senate. Also, the Lieutenant Governor takes over the duties and powers of the Governor if s/he is unable to serve for whatever reason. Under the Texas Constitution, the Governor is considered unable to serve if s/he dies (duh!) or is ill or otherwise incapacitated, impeached, or leaves the state for any significant amount of time.

COMPARING THE POWERS

While at first glance the Lieutenant Governor does not appear more powerful, when looked at more closely it becomes clearer.

The Lieutenant Governor has the power to appoint any and all chairs of committees within the State Senate. S/he also determines when and to which committees' bills are sent and (since timing is very important in lawmaking) this can have an enormous impact, since it effectively can dictate when – and even whether - bills make it out of committee and to a vote. Even if a bill does make it out of committee, the Lieutenant Governor still has power over it, since s/he decides when a bill may be brought up for a vote and when senators may be recognized for floor action.

These powers actually make the Lieutenant Governor more influential than the Governor, specifically because they are related to the legislative branch of the government. This means that the Lieutenant Governor actually has more power over what laws are and aren't passed and all the Governor can do is sign or veto them – and, even in that event, the Senate can overturn a veto with a two-thirds majority vote.

Since the Lieutenant Governor is also the Governor's "Just in Case" replacement, s/he also has the potential to take over the Governor's executive branch powers as well. This creates the possibility of a Governor who returns to his/her position with major changes having been made in his/her absence.



THE ORIGIN OF THESE POWERS

During the Reconstruction Period in the United States following the Civil War, Texas was under the control of a Governor. Because of this, many local elected officials

who had been part of the Confederacy were removed from office, and new judges, prosecutors, and officials were appointed. Understandably, those who had supported the Confederacy during the war didn't like this as it allowed for the federal government to push more of its Reconstruction policies on them. When the time came, this led to the writers of the revised Texas Constitution dispersing powers between the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and the Speaker. They also revised many positions to become elected ones as opposed to being appointed by the Governor. This weakened the state's executive branch, opening the way for the Lieutenant Governor to become more powerful through the legislative branch.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR TEXAS

The power of the Lieutenant Governor is not an inherently good or bad thing. It all depends on who is wielding it. S/he can either use her/his power to push forward bills that will help Texas citizens, or use it to block them. It's up to the citizens of Texas to elect a Lieutenant Governor that they trust to properly serve and respond to their needs.

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