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Lt. Gov Duties in Other States 'Substantial.' What Will Happen in Ill.?

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By Jeff Goldblatt, FOX Chicago News

Chicago - The larger-than-life cardboard cut-out is hard to miss amid the traditional ornate trappings on the third floor of the Indiana Statehouse. It's a bold billboard of sorts that on one hand overtly informs Hoosiers they're at the office of Indiana's Lieutenant Governor, but on the other hand seems subtly designed to showcase **Becky Skillman**, their state's second-in-command, in a variety of leadership roles.

In one photo, the second-term Republican is shown walking among camouflaged-dressed soldiers, outfitted herself in army green. In another photo, the Lieutenant Governor is wearing her well-appointed business attire for a ribbon cutting, clasping a set of ceremonial set of scissors, flanked by business leaders.

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It's a portfolio of duties Skillman said she well appreciates: "I always thrive on the excitement of having a good mix of responsibilities. They can be quite varied, from counterterrorism to being on the farm."

All told, Indiana's Lieutenant Governor has 46 constitutional and statutorily approved duties. In addition to being the first in line in secession, and the President of the Indiana State Senate, the Lieutenant Governor of Indiana oversees a full compliment of departments ranging from Housing to Energy to Agriculture.

According to Julia Hurst, Executive Director of the **National Lieutenant Governor's Association**, Indiana's Lieutenant Governor is responsible for more duties than any other Lieutenant Governor nationwide.

"Her duties are substantial," Hurst said.

The body of work taken on by Indiana's Lieutenant Governor could not be more different and more significant than the largely ceremonial duties of the Illinois Lieutenant Governor, in Indiana's neighboring state.

These days, the embattled position in Illinois holds somewhat of an endangered status after the controversial Primary Election win and subsequent withdrawal of Democratic nominee, Scott Lee Cohen. Cohen's victory prompted Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan to introduce a constitutional amendment to dissolve the position of Lieutenant Governor.

Then again, the position has been vacant since January 2009, when Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn succeeded impeached and ousted Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

As political heavyweights in Illinois line up to push the position of Lieutenant Governor off a political mountain, the trend among the majority of the 50 states actually reflects that the position is mounting in importance and broadening in duties.

"The trend now is to grow the position of Lieutenant Governor, throughout the decade of 2000 and now into this decade," said Hurst. "I think it's a good way to set up government. There is more than enough to go around and the office of Lieutenant Governor is arguably where it should be."

In January, New Jersey seated its first Lieutenant Governor after creating the office in 2005. Meantime, in Virginia, the first Executive Orders of newly-elected Gov. Bob McDonnell (R) assigned the state's Lieutenant Governor the title of Chief Job Creation Officer.

Nationwide, 45 states have the position of Lieutenant Governor. Of the five states without one, Arizona, Oregon and Wyoming use the Secretary of State as the first in line of succession. Maine and New Hampshire use the Senate President.

For Indiana residents, Lt. Gov. Skillman said the job is something Indiana residents especially value after the death of then-Gov. Frank O'Bannon (he died while in office more than six years ago), and the subsequent succession of Lt. Gov. Joe Kernan to the state's top post.

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"I think our citizens here of Indiana prefer two state executives," Skillman said. "They feel more confident knowing someone is always ready to step in should the worst occur."

When asked whether the position of Illinois Lieutenant Governor is worth saving, Skillman said she doesn't have a good impression of what the job has accomplished over the years in Illinois. But she said Lieutenant Governors perform vital functions in many states nationwide, including Indiana.

"If I were a Governor, I think it would be comforting to have a Lieutenant Governor there to help share the burden and the responsibility," Skillman said.

The facts underscore that reality.

Hurst said since the founding of the United States, no more than three states have abolished the position of Lieutenant Governor, all of them bringing back the position, most recently Maryland in 1970.

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