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Statewide Races in NJ and VA Create Opportunities for Women VA Has Woman Lt. Governor Candidate on Democratic Ticket; NJ Gubernatorial Candidates Pick Women as Running Mates

In 2009, only New Jersey and Virginia have statewide elections. No women are running for governor in either state. However, in Virginia, Jody Wagner won the Democratic primary for lieutenant governor and will be running on the ticket with gubernatorial candidate Creigh Deeds. If elected, Wagner would become the first woman to serve as lieutenant governor in the Commonwealth and would be in line to become the first woman governor.

In New Jersey, the candidates for the newly created position of lieutenant governor are selected by the winners of each party's gubernatorial primary.¹ Incumbent Governor Jon S. Corzine has selected State Senator Loretta Weinberg from Bergen County as his running mate. The Republican challenger, Chris Christie, has also selected a woman as his running mate, Monmouth County Sheriff Kim Guadagno. This means a major party victory in November would put a woman in statewide office in New Jersey for only the second time. Moreover, in a state where governors have left office on several recent occasions, either Guadagno or Weinberg would be in line to become the state's second woman governor.

"Since there are no other statewide elected executive positions in New Jersey, the opportunity to run for lieutenant governor offers a rare chance for political visibility," observes Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. "In the Garden State's entire history, there has been only one woman governor and no women elected to the U.S. Senate." (Christine Todd Whitman served as New Jersey's first woman governor from 1994-2001.)

Walsh added, "Virginia has never elected a woman governor, lieutenant governor, or U.S. senator, although it has twice elected women to serve in the only other statewide elected executive position, attorney general."

CAWP reports that in other states, lieutenant governors and other women elected statewide have often moved up to the top job. Of the 31 women who have served as governors, 8 first gained that office by succeeding a governor who died or left office mid-term. Of those, two went on to be elected governor in their own right, and one (current Arizona Governor Jan Brewer) has not yet had an opportunity to run. Fourteen women served as lieutenant governors (or in the position next in line to become governor) in their states before being elected governor. Another 7 held other statewide elective executive jobs before being elected as their states' chief executives.

¹ Until this year, New Jersey has had only one statewide elected executive, the governor, and the senate president has served as acting governor when the incumbent left office.

Seventy three women are currently statewide elected executives (23.2%). Seven women serve as governors (in AK, AZ, CT, HI, MI, NC, WA), a number that will drop to six when Alaska Governor Sarah Palin resigns. Eight women now serve as lieutenant governors (in CO, IA, IN, MN, NM, OK, RI, WI). In addition to the current lieutenant governors, four other women are next in the line of succession in their states, including senate presidents in Maine and New Hampshire, the attorney general of Illinois², and the secretary of state in Oregon.

Forty three states currently have lieutenant governors, and an additional three place the attorney general or secretary of state in line to succeed the governor. In three states, the senate president is next in the line of succession.

For more information on women serving in statewide elective office, visit http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/statewide.php.

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About CAWP

The Center for American Women and Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is a university-based research, education and public service center. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's changing relationship to politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. CAWP is a leading authority in its field and a respected bridge between the academic and political worlds.

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² Illinois elects a lieutenant governor, but that position is vacant because the previous lieutenant governor succeeded the governor, who was removed from office.