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Governors as CEOs: An Evolution

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Governors as CEOs: An Evolution

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Abstract: This paper examines the emergence of American governors as modern day CEOs from the historical perspective. In the 1960s, the shift in the power of the governorship was beginning, and by the 1970s, the trend toward stronger chief executives was reinforced by various federalism initiatives and the increasing complexity of managing state government. As the 1980s arrived, shifts in federal responsibilities to state governments, economic challenges and competitiveness, increased urbanization, demands for additional services and programs, and accelerating technologies have required a new kind of leadership in the governor's office. Such leadership requires not only authority, but a managerial expertise and information to be successful and effective as a governor. With this emergence of a "new breed" of governors, the office has acquired a growth in respect and power. Over the last forty years, five out of the last seven U.S presidents were state governors before becoming the country's chief executive. This is unprecedented in American history.

During the first half of the twentieth century, governors mostly functioned in the traditional role as state figurehead in a strongly political framework. They were often not known beyond their state's boundaries, and they spent an estimated 15% of their time on traditional management and administration. Today, if states were considered corporations, most would be among the Fortune 500 companies! Now governors are functioning more like corporate chief executive officers than traditional politicians. This paper seeks to explain this shift toward governors becoming influential, effective and powerful organizational leaders.

INTRODUCTION

"The governors are coming, the governors are coming!" That is how then Governor Lamar Alexander of Tennessee opened the annual meeting of the National Governors Association meeting in 1985 in his "Chairman's Speech" in Boise, Idaho (Alexander, 1985). Indeed, the governors were arriving at a new place on the national scene. Over a span of around forty years, the prominence and influence of governors changed considerably in this nation.

This paper examines the emergence of the American governors functioning as modern day CEOs, from a historical prospective. In the 1960s, the shift in the power of the governorship was beginning, and by the 1970s, the trend toward stronger chief executives was reinforced by various federalism initiatives and by the increasing complexity of managing state government. When the 1980s arrived, state governments were striving to be economically competitive amid an environment of social and economic change, dramatic technological advances, shifting demographics, increasing urbanization, and other factors. Over the last forty-plus years, five out of the last seven U.S presidents were state governors before becoming the country's chief executive. This is unprecedented in American history.

During the first half of the twentieth century, governors seemed to function in the traditional role of state figurehead in a strongly political framework. They were often not known beyond their state's boundaries, and they spent an estimated 15% of their time on traditional management and administration (Behn & Behn, 1986). Today, if states were considered corporations, most or all would be among the Fortune 500 companies! Today's governors have become managers and leaders, functioning more like corporate chief executive officers than traditional politicians. This paper seeks to describe this major shift that has led to how governors have become influential, effective and powerful organizational leaders, functioning as CEOs.

THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF GOVERNORS

The term "governor" is about the only aspect of the governorship that has not drastically changed throughout America's history (Sabato, 1983). The first governors in America wielded a great deal of power while serving at the pleasure of the king during the colonial period. After the American Revolution, when the original 13 colonies wrote their state constitutions, the new Americans showed their distrust for executive power (Behn, 1986; Brough, 1986) through the creation of strong legislatures (Sabato 1983; Sanford, 1967). The governorship was weakened and became not much more than a figurehead (Brough, 1986). Lambert (1960) quoted James Madison as calling the governors "little more than ciphers" when compared with the "omnipotent legislatures."

As the American presidency gained power and respect so did the governorship. During Andrew Jackson's presidency, the governorship regained some its lost power and authority and developed additional respect, as did the office of president (Sabato, 1983). It was during this period that many governors' terms were lengthened to four years and their powers broadened.

When the Civil War occurred, it weakened the governorship considerably... The ultimate resort of secession gave way to "national supremacy" (Sanford, 1967, p. 20). In 1888, Bryce (quoted Sanford, 1967) wrote that the "office of governor carries little either of dignity or of power" (p. 149).

Recognizing the potential power of governors, President Theodore Roosevelt called the first governors' conference in 1908 as he sought support for his conservation initiatives. The governors were still seen as somewhat weak, and they were sharing authority with elected officials over whom they had no control (MacDonald, 1927). The outlook for the future of the governorship at that time has been described as "weak and bleak" (Solomon, 1983, p. 42). However, the starting of a collaboration of the governors on national issues was beginning.

Since 1908, state governors have met for every year with the exception of 1909 and 1917. The National Governors' Association grew out of this first meeting of the states' governors and was formally organized by Woodrow Wilson in 1912 creating a bipartisan voice for the governors to the President and Congress. It also provided assistance to governors on domestic and state management issues. This has given the governors a new power in numbers as they have banded together to foster and influence national policy issues. At present, the strong voice of the governors is being heard on the health care reform issues.

Almost at the same time, the 16th Amendment to the Constitution, passed in 1913, strengthened federal power with the federal income tax and lessened power of the states (McLeod, 1986). Later, the national focus on World War I and "The Great Depression" further weakened the states. States did not have resources or remedies for such massive social and economic problems (Sanford, 1967).

The people turned to Washington for help since only the federal government had the where-with-all to correct what had gone wrong in America (Castle, 1988). Baliles (1988) described the 1930s as the "geographic fault line in federalism" (p. 8) with the New Deal beginning an era of even greater federal assumption of authority, and the federal government being seen as the problem solver. Former North Carolina Governor Sanford (1967) wrote that from the viewpoint of efficacy of state government, the states lost their confidence, and the people lost their faith in the states during the Depression. A gap widened at this time between citizen confidence and the authority and responsibility of state governments (Sabato, 1983). As the power of states weakened so did the office of governor.

During the 1920s, the abuse of power by Governor Huey Long of Louisiana further weakened the office of governor as well as the prestige. He held almost complete control of the state of Louisiana "through his indomitable will and his sheer strength of personality" (Brooks, 2007, p. 220). In 1949, Laski asserted that state governments were so hopeless that the governors were either "second-rate" (p. 146) or using the governorship to ascend to higher office. By this time, many of the duties of governors had become ceremonial.

The style of Alabama Governor George Wallace further weakened the perception and prestige of the office of governor. His perpetual campaigning for over two decades, and his stands on civil rights issues hurt creditability of the office. He even had his wife run for his office when he could not succeed himself. His terms were marked by political action, but little concrete results (Brooks, 2007, p. 220).

By contrast, in the twentieth century, governors, acquired significantly more legitimate power from the state legislatures. Additionally, the path to the U. S. presidency was increasingly going through the governor's office. (Beyle 2008, p. 202). In 1900, former New York governor Theodore Roosevelt was elected to the first of two terms as president. He was followed by Woodrow Wilson, former governor of New Jersey, elected in 1912. Later, former New York governor, Franklin D. Roosevelt became president in 1932 and served until his death in 1945.

In the 1960s a shift in the significance and power of the governorship was beginning. Several strong governors emerged like Terry Sanford of North Carolina, Dan Evans of Washington, Nelson Rockefeller of New York, and John Chafee of Rhode Island. Sanford (1967) called the governors "the most potent political power" in the states and offered this challenge to governors:

> The center of the state system, and its chief proponent in the eyes of the people, is the governor. The governor's prestige and his power to move people and ideas within his state are the strongest weapons in each state arsenal. The future of the American system could well be determined by his performance. (Sanford, p. 21)

Moore (1988) asserted that from 1933-1980, the role of the federal government grew more quickly that the role of the states, but since the late 1960s. Every federal administration through Reagan's has "rediscovered" the states and developed some federalism issue. This can currently be seen in the Health Care Reforms bills, in both the senate and house versions, which push much of the needed funding down to the states and reinforcing federalism.

Former California governor, President Richard Nixon introduced the "New Federalism," the basis of the State and Local Assistance Act of 1972, which resulted in revenue sharing with the states (Baliles, 1988) and contributed to the changing role of governors. Ironically, this bill was drafted by Lamar Alexander, then an aide to Senator Howard Baker, who would later become governor of Tennessee (McLeod, 1986). The ability of the governor to provide leadership was the foundation of the New Federalism and that the increased role of governor would demand political leadership (Morehouse, 1976).

The new leadership in the governorship began evolving in the 1970s, according to Osborne (1988). Fundamental economic transitions demanded new roles for government and new ideologies. He observed:

> The last two decades have been a period of ideological interregnum, in which neither party, or any coherent ideology, has established its dominance. But if one looks closely, one can see a new political paradigm evolving in America's state capitols. (p. 14)

By 1972, pollster Louis Harris identified governors as the "best known of political figures in the country" (cited in State of the States, 1972, p. 21) besides the president. Reapportionment of state legislatures, modernization of state constitutions, and a great deal of administrative reform have contributed to the states' authority and capacity to govern (Doyle & Hartle, 1985). Additional resources that provide for expanded governors' staffs have also enhanced the capacity for effectively governing

(Beyle, 1983). Furthermore, these resources have continued to grow with the growth of electronic technology.

Just as Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter was elected president in 1976, Americans began to sense something was very wrong with the national economy (Osborne, 1988). The worst recession since the 1930s set in. Governors had to deal with problems generated by high unemployment rates, staggering interest rates of 16-18%, and a stagnant economy. Carter had been a governor himself and understood the difficulty of the states; however, because of the Iran hostage crisis and the failing economy, his credibility slipped. Several governors like Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis and California Governor Brown developed new economic strategies for their states. The southern governors like Bill Clinton of Arkansas, William Winter of Mississippi, Richard Riley of South Carolina, and Lamar Alexander of Tennessee began supporting comprehensive education reform (Osborne, 1988). The recognition of the global economy began taking shape.

Former California governor, President Ronald Reagan followed up with historic cuts in federal grants to states that focused greater attention to the states. In so doing, he curbed "the size and influence of the federal establishment" (Nathan & Doolittle, 1987, p. 167).

Then Governor Blanchard of Michigan (1988) argued that domestic policy initiatives no longer originate in Washington and that active state governments were then tackling social programs. Governors are identified as taking the lead in formulating initiatives in the area of national domestic policy according to the National Governors' Association (The Institutional Powers of the Governorship, 1987). Former John Kean of New Jersey (1988b) declared that governors are "crafting innovative solutions to problems with which Congress ... cannot deal" (p. 77) because of the federal deficit and other problems. Governors have been pushed into this role by the federal deficit and the cutbacks in domestic and social programs. Former Governor Sununu of New Hampshire (1988a) maintained that governors must meet the pressing needs of citizens who face real problems that require societal support.

The trend of stronger chief executives was reinforced by the new federalism initiatives and by the increasing complexity of managing state governments in the economically competitive 1980s (Brough, 1986). Sabato (1983) attributed the governor's resurrection to the "intricate interweaving of the social, political, economic, and institutional forces that wrought urbanization, the civil rights revolution, the spread of the party competition and reapportionment" (p. 201). The resultant "new breed" of governors (Osborne, 1988; Scheppach, 1983) had and will continue to have enormous significance for government in the United States. Clearly over the past 30 years, the American governor has emerged as a major policy leader and is currently emerging as a leader as the responsibilities of state management increase (Ransone, 1982).

Governor Kean of New Jersey (1986) said that "the action isn't in Washington anymore. It's in the states" (p. 52). Alexander and Orr (1986) expanded on that thesis:

> For there to be action in the states, there has to be leadership. That is what governors are for. That is what they do. For, if people want action, the person to whom they will logically look for the necessary leadership is the chief executive. The governors are CEO's of state government not because the state constitutions say they are, but because the people want them to be. The action is in the states, in part, because Washington has been caught up in its own, internal quarrels, and in part because when the voters want something done, they recognize that the states have to do it (p.52).

In 1986, Behn further noted that when there's a job to be done, the public counts on the governor to get it done and that's what makes a governor the state's CEO. It has taken two centuries of various forms of change to transform the office of governor from a figurehead into that of state CEO (Brough, 1986).

Former Governor John Sununu of New Hampshire and later chief of staff for President H. W. Bush (1988) observed after his tenure that American governors are now on the front line of government. Muchmore (1981) claimed that "traditional management and administration," (p. 5) which once took up about 15% of a governor's time, now seem to be the most important aspect of the office. When one considers that if the 50 states were considered corporations, all 50 would rank among the Fortune 500 companies (Behn & Behn, 1986), the CEO concept becomes even more significant. In 1985, in a speech to the National Governors' Association, Alexander called upon the organization to help governors to be better chief executives--noting that governors should spend more time on better schools, better roads, better jobs, cleaner water, and other such domestic concerns which he described as the job of governors. Scheppach (1989) noted as the role of governors has changed and evolved so has the National Governors' Association.

While President Reagan was denouncing government intervention in the marketplace, governors emerged in the role of economic activists (Osborne, 1988). They took up issues of economic development for their states, welfare reform and education, which both had direct impact on their state economies. The backlash against the Great Society had produced an altered state government (Lee, 1981; McLeod, 1986). One result of all this has been the emergence of governors as corporate chief-executive officers of their states. Behn (cited in McLeod, 1986) said that despite lingering lack of formal authority, “governors are now performing like chief executives officers” (p. 9).

THE NEW BREED OF GOVERNORS AS CEOS

In the early 1990s and again in 2001, following in the footsteps of Carter and Reagan, two governors once more became presidents. Both had enjoyed popularity and success in leading their respective states. Bill Clinton had been elected to four terms as Governor of Arkansas, giving him extensive experience under the new emerging paradigms of governing a state. George W. Bush was elected president after having been elected governor of Texas, serving as CEO of a major league baseball team and of Texas oil companies. Both had advanced education degrees, Clinton had a law degree from Yale, and Bush had a Master of Business Administration from Harvard. Both fit the descriptions of a “new breed of governors that both Osborne (1988) and Scheppach, (1983) had predicted would emerge and have an enormous significance to the United States government.

Governor Terry Sanford of North Carolina was a leader and trail-blazer in the evolution of state governors to becoming the chief-executive-officer of a state. He wrote two years after leaving the governorship that he detected “a sense of direction and excitement of action in our American states” (1967, p 44). He also developed a clear set of goals for state reform on behalf of the governors:

> Make the chief executive of the state the chief executive in fact.
>
> The two-year term for governors should be replaced with a four-year term, and a governor should be allowed to succeed himself at least once.
>
> The governor should be given the dominant authority over the budget process. The governor should be the chief planner of the state enabling the state to look forward.
>
> The governor should have the authority to reorganize and regroup the executive agencies subject to legislative veto within a specified period of time.
>
> The governor must have adequate staff to represent adequately the public interest.
>
> The governor’s office should be organized to be receptive to new ideas and use the experience of other states in seeking fresh solutions to problems. (p. 45)

The "governorships prospered under these new initiatives." (Beyle, 2008, p. 206) and reforms outlined by Sanford. Over the next decades following Sanford's reforms, nearly every state reworked its government, thus, expanding the powers and influence of the American governorship. However, the reforms that Sanford designed for expanding a state governor's role, responsibilities and influence are reflected in the current day-to-day functions of most governors. In fact, Sanford's set of goals for reforms serve as a basis for an index for measuring institutional powers of the governorship today.

As far back as 1983, Ray Scheppach (1983), Executive Director of the National Governors' Association, traced the last 75 years of the governorship:

> Vast changes have occurred. State constitutions have been modernized, their court systems streamlined and legislature reapportioned, reorganized and strengthened. The governors' authority has been strengthened, their office staffs upgraded, their control over administrative staffs and agencies extended. In what the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations called a 'transformation over the past 20 years with no parallel in history, states have become the federal system's resurgent partners. Governors are younger, better educated, with more political, and administrative talent than ever before. (p. 34).

Today, the governor is the chief policymaker in the American states. The governor's ability to provide political leadership will affect the quality and distribution of public policy. Now, when people want their problems solved, they look to the states (Alexander & Orr, 1986) --not the federal government as they did 50 years ago. Governors are seriously engaged in issues that "will determine the future of this country," and they make decisions every day that "really count, both governmentally and politically" (Broder, 1986, p.13). Behn and Behn (1986) noted that the real change in today's governors has come in the thinking and behavior of the governors themselves. They maintained that the governors are taking their executive responsibilities seriously, redefining their own role, and essentially writing a new job description, not just for themselves, but for others who follow them to the governorship in the years to come.

Long ago, Sanford noted that governors set the agenda for public decision making and can cover the state with their ideas, innovation and by utilizing and maximizing the governor's special access to the media (1967). In 2007, *Legacy of Innovation Governors and Public Policy* was published. It is a testament to the innovation of state governors. This testament is particularly true of governors over the past thirty years. Currently, governors struggle to develop effective initiatives to emerging challenges while they are playing "a major role in shaping economic and social climate of today" (Sribnick, 2007, p. vii). To illustrate this, topics such as leadership in a global economy, homeland security, global warming, pollution controls, economic recovery from disaster, and the improving the nation's economic competitiveness have dominated the National Governors' Association agenda over the last six years (Sribnick, 2007, p. 254-256).

Grappling with these issues has required different skills, knowledge and education, experience in governors than in the "goodtime Charlies" described by Sabato (1983). Today's, modern governors have evolved into functioning more as a CEO than a traditional politician. This trend was noted as far back as 1986 (McLeod), when he noted that governors had become "more like a corporate chief-executive-officer than a traditional politician." Sabato noted this trend in 1983:

The "good-time Charlies" who once dominated the governorships, could command little respect at home or beyond their state boundaries; more importantly shackled by their inadequacies and those of their state governments, they could accomplish little for their people. The "goodtime Charlies" are gone. In Arizona, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Missouri, Washington and West Virginia, and almost all states across the country, concerned, capable, accomplished persons have been elected in their stead. (p. 201). The powers of governors have expanded, but "governor responsibilities have mushroomed. The"good-time

Charlies" would be clueless in the current environment. Federalism expansion, new programs and services and unimagined challenges" revolutionized the scope and aim of governors. To be an effective and successful governor in the 21st century, governors must be proven administrators, executives, business people, negotiators and boosters (Brooks, 2007, p. 220).

Lewis Lavine, a political consultant and former deputy governor of Tennessee, reflected on the shift in the ways governors now lead and manage more in the CEO model:

Historically, there has been a divide among the three sectors of our economy: business leaders have succeeded by using proven business principles, nonprofit sector leaders have appealed to emotion and passion, while government leaders have pursued pure political power. Having served in all three sectors, I have observed the differences. But recently these gaps in methods have narrowed. Nowhere is this more in evidence than in the case of the Governors of U.S. states. In the past twenty years, Governors, led first by those in the South, have employed business principles to set specific programmatic goals and to achieve them. From using Collins' dictum to put the right people on the bus, to Deming's quality efforts, to relying on quantifiable data, Governors have shifted the definition of power from one of raw influence over interests and individuals to one of genuinely improving the jobs and education of their constituents. (Lavine, 2009).

TEN "NEW BREED" GOVERNORS

In this study, ten governors are identified as examples of the "new breed" of governors and behaving more like CEOs than in the traditional governors' model of years past. Table 1 identifies the ten governors and provides other basic information including their states, terms, and their ages. Table 2 outlines the education and experience of the ten governors along with identification of initiatives relating to effective management of state government.

All ten governors are well-educated. Nine of the ten have higher degrees beyond a bachelor degree. Barbour, Crist, Daniels, Napolitano, Sebelius and Pawlenty have law degrees. Romney has a joint degree of JD/MBA (law and master of business administration) from Harvard. Corzine has an MBA degree. Jindal has a master degree from Oxford and was a Rhodes Scholar. Bredesen earned his undergraduate degree from Harvard.

All have had careers outside of government. Five have had experience in being a CEO. Phil Bredesen founded Healthcare America, Corp. a health care management company that eventually employed 6000 people and was publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange. He sold his controlling interest in the company in 1986, and he does not accept a governor's salary. He managed the state of Tennessee out of near-bankruptcy with a reformed health care plan and more responsible fiscal management.

Mitt Romney was CEO of a company that he founded, and went on to be CEO of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Utah. When he took the helm, the Olympics was 379 million short of its budget and was suffering significant management problems. He revamped the leadership, management and policies, boosted fundraising, and reinvented security plans following 9/11. When the Olympics ended, the games cleared $100 million not counting the 224 million in security provided by contributors. (Romney, 2004, pp. 375-376).

Mitch Daniels was CEO of the Hudson Institute. He left that position to join E. I. Lilly Company to become President of the North American Operations and later was promoted to Vice President for Corporate Strategy and Policy for the E. I. Lilly worldwide. Haley Barbour served as CEO of the Republican National Committee, in his position as Chairman. Jon Corzine was Chairman and Co-CEO of Goldman Sachs after an extensive career in finance and banking.

TABLE 1

Governors	State	Terms	Age
Haley Barbour	Mississippi	2004 - present	64
Phil Bredesen	Tennessee	2006 - present	66
Jon Corzine	New Jersey	2006 - 2009	62
Charlie Crist	Florida	2007 - present	53
Mitch Daniels	Indiana	2005 - present	60
Bobby Jindal	Louisiana	2008 - present	38
Janet Napolitano	Arizona	2002 - 2008	52
Tim Pawlenty	Minnesota	2002 - present	49
Mitt Romney	Massachusetts	2002-2006	62
Kathleen Sebelius	Kansas	2002-2008	61

Sources: Governors' websites and National Governors' Association website

TABLE 2
GOVERNORS' EDUCATION & EXPERIENCE

Governors	State	Bachelor Degree	Higher Degree	CEO Experience	Other Executive Experience	Fiscal Initiatives & Reforms
Haley Barbour	Mississippi	X	X	X	X	X
Phil Bredesen	Tennessee	X		X	X	X
Jon Corzine	New Jersey	X	X	X	X	X
Charlie Crist	Florida	X	X		X	X
Mitch Daniels	Indiana	X	X	X	X	X
Bobby Jindal	Louisiana	X	X		X	X
Janet Napolitano	Arizona	X	X		X	X
Tim Pawlenty	Minnesota	X	X		X	X
Mitt Romney	Massachusetts	X	X	X	X	X
Kathleen Sebelius	Kansas	X	X		X	X

Sources: Governors' websites and National Governors' Association website

CONCLUSION

The governor trail blazers of the 60s, 70s, and 80s gave rise to this "new breed" of governors as CEOs. A confluence of events, needs and situations brought about this shift from a traditional, political orientation in governing states to a larger role in management and leadership in the states. That emergence is seen everyday in the actions and results of governors in the states that they lead.

Governors have a unique space of America to work in – their states. This is an opportunity for creativity and innovation that doesn't exist in any other part of the American government. Tommy Thompson, former governor of Wisconsin from 1987-2001 and later U.S. secretary of health and human services under George W. Bush, addressed the benefits of being a governor at the annual meeting of the National Governors' Association in 2006. "You don't realize how wonderful it is to be a governor until you leave and go to Washington." He further elaborated, "When you're a governor, you wake up in the morning with an idea, and you have someone working on it by 11:00 in the morning" (Thompson, (2006). He further noted that was not how it worked as a U S. secretary in Washington.

Governor Lamar Alexander of Tennessee envisioned creating more jobs in Tennessee and strengthening the state economy. He recruited the first foreign automobile manufacturer, Nissan, to the U.S., about 30 miles from Nashville. A few years later, he landed the Saturn GM plant near the already functioning Nissan plant. These are only two events that lead to an overall improvement in the state economy.

Governor Janet Napolitano of Arizona converted a 1 billion dollar deficit in 2003 into a 300 million dollar surplus – without raising taxes! A newly-inaugurated Governor Bobby Jindal of Louisiana set in place a strategic plan based on lessons learned from the Katrina disaster to ensure that history did not repeat itself in New Orleans. When Hurricane Ike approached the Gulf Coast in August 2008, New Orleans and other parts of the Louisiana coast were prepared.

Governor Charlie Crist of Florida even refers to himself as the "CEO of Florida" (Gregory, NBC News, Feb. 22, 2009). This "new breed" of governors shows examples of governors acting as CEOs with vision and producing results from the vision. Many other examples exist as well as other "new breed" governors, but they are too numerous to mention in this study. However, the changes that are seen in the ways governors lead and manage today can be traced back to that time in the 60s, 70s, and 80s when paradigms of how governors govern changed forever.

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