

State Constitutions IV

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Fourth in a Series

The nation's 50 governors, each the chief executive of his own state, fill the only state-wide administrative office voted on by the electorate in every state.

But no two of them have the same authority. Some governors are "weak," while others are "strong." Their degree of power stems not from their physical performance, but from the authority granted them by their state's constitution.

Framers of state constitutions have followed the pattern of the U.S. Constitution and established three branches of government--legislative, judicial and executive. Each is intended to be kept in proper balance by a system of checks established against the other.

However, authors of early state constitutions generally were afraid of the strong executive and refused to follow the federal example in that respect. One explanation is that organizers of the first states had an excessive fear of executive power because royal governors under the British had been focal points of cause for rebellion.

In only two of the colonies (Rhode Island and Connecticut) was the governor chosen by the people. And in 11 of the original 13 states, the governor was elected at first by the lawmakers. The exceptions were New York and Massachusetts.

Political scientists see a "strong" governor as having, through his state's constitution, four kinds of leadership: legislative, political, administrative and symbolic. He must have the power to formulate and secure passage of legislation, the power to influence his fellow party members within the legislature, the power to direct administrative action, and the power to command respect.

The newest state constitutions ~~for~~^{those} of Alaska, Hawaii and New Jersey allow the state governments to be directed by "strong" governors. Alaska's constitution is said by many political scientists to come closer to carrying out the separation of power theory than any other state constitution.

In Alaska, the governor and the secretary of state are the only

(more)

First add

state officers filled initially by election. The two candidates of each party run as a team (like the candidates for U.S. President and Vice President) in the general election after being nominated separately in the primary election.

Alaska's governor appoints the state budget officer and with approval of the legislature names the attorney general, tax commissioner, finance administrator, educational superintendent, labor commissioner, and health and welfare director.

The lieutenant governor is secretary of state in Hawaii. The governor and state senate name the treasurer, attorney general, tax commissioner, budget director, controller, and commissioners of agriculture, labor, health and welfare. The governor appoints the educational superintendent and and the legislature names the state auditor.

In New Jersey, the auditor is named by the legislature but the governor and senate appoint the secretary of state, treasurer, attorney general and other officials such as the tax commissioner, budget director, educational superintendent and welfare director.

In New York, the governor and lieutenant governor are elected as a team, with the state's voters electing two other administrative officers, the comptroller and attorney general.

In Maine, the legislature chooses the secretary of state, treasurer, auditor, attorney general and educational superintendent. Legislatures also make important appointments in New Hampshire and Tennessee.

Still another situation is found in Mississippi, a "weak governor" state where such officials as the secretary of state, lieutenant governor, attorney general, treasurer, auditor, educational superintendent, tax collectors and commissioners of insurance, land, agriculture, highways and public service are elected.

(including Washington)

Attorneys general are elected in 42 states and appointed in eight, usually by the governor. Appointment is by the legislature in Maine and by the Supreme Court in Tennessee. In three states, the secretary of state is chosen by the legislature, in seven by the governor and in the (including Washington) others filled through election by the people.

(including Washington)

Minnesota in 1962 is joining the growing list of states electing governors for four year terms. This will bring the total to 35. Two year terms prevail in the other 15 states.